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OR,
The League of the Sworn Seven.

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"CIBUTA JOHN," "REDLIGHT RALPH,"
"TWILIGHT CHARLIE," "FIGHTING
HARRY," "OLD RIDDLES,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BILLY'S EXIT IN A SACK.

"Sweet pertaters!"
It was a boy's exclamation—a solidly built lad, keen of eye, strong of limb, and of goodly proportions. He appeared to be about seventeen years of age. He had on no hat, and neither coat nor vest. His hands were securely tied behind his back.

"Sweet pertaters!" he repeated, as a blind

BILLY WAS PUT INTO A SACK AND DROPPED OVER THE SIDE OF THE BOAT INTO THE COLD, DARK WATERS OF THE BAY!

door closed behind his back, leaving him standing alone in a very queer place—seemingly a kind of Eden Musee Chamber of Horrors, apparently arranged with special reference to terrorizing everybody who ventured, or was thrust, into the uncanny room.

It was, as the boy was pushed in, aglow with a red glare, which came from a grim chandelier overhead, whose globes were seven skulls. By this light he found himself confronted with a heap of bones on the floor beneath the chandelier—evidently the skeletons of the victims whose skulls radiated the red light.

Around this heap seven swords were standing upright, their points in the floor. Behind each of the swords was a stool, covered with a square of black cloth, the four corners of which just touched the floor.

The prisoner, for such he evidently was, it is needless to say, was our whilom street friend, Broadway Billy—the irrepressible Billy, and now, to all appearances, in a desperate situation.

"Sweet pertaters an' goose-grease!" he ejaculated, with additional emphasis, as he had looked carefully around, "but this beats th' Dutch, this does! This is what I would call a surprise-party fer one! Golly! but I'd like ter have Skinny here! Bet a hair-pin he'd be skart until his bones rattled in his breeches."

Billy had been "skart" enough himself, at the first shock, but now that was passing away, and his natural coolness stood him in good use. He was gritty and brave, and had faced so many dangers, that he had become in a measure hardened to them.

"If I only had th' use o' my hands," he chattered, "I would be a little more at liberty nor what I am as it is. It was very thoughtless o' my friends ter turn me loose in this den with my hands tied; an' there ain't much of a 'turn loose' about that, anyhow. Wonder what they mean ter do with me? They got th' bulge on me this deal, an' no error about that. Mostly my own fault too. Wonder if I ever will have any brain in my head, where th' mush an' milk now slops around in place o' brain? There is nothin' more useful to a feller than brain, an' I guess I wasn't around when that was dealt out. If I'd had any, mebbe I wouldn't be in this fix. But, here I be, an' there's no use mournin' over that fack. What I want ter do now is ter try an' git out ag'in. How in th' name o' wonder did I git in?"

Unable to give himself any satisfactory answer, Billy sat down upon one of the seven stools and was silent for a time.

"Skinny has often told me," he presently broke out again, "that I would keep on until I got myself into a diffikilty that I wouldn't git out of, an' it looks as if I'm inter it now. Th' way out o' here isn't by any means plain ter be seen, that is sartain. If it wasn't fer th' smilin' faces up there above me," with a glance up at the hideous chandelier, "I really believe I'd be lonesome. I wish Skinny could take a peep at me just about now; I'd like ter hear what he'd remark. But there is one feller that I wouldn't care ter have see me in sich a fix, for it might lower me in his estimation, an' that is Inspector Br— Sweet pertaters! what is up now?"

With that exclamation his meditations ended. Of a sudden the lights in the skulls had shrunk to a mere glow, and the room for the moment was plunged into almost perfect darkness.

At the same time a noise was heard, as though of many feet hurriedly entering the room, and in a moment more the lights were turned up again to their full, and the apartment was as brightly illumined as before.

But a change had taken place. Seven persons besides the boy were there assembled.

These were seven men, clad from head to feet in flowing robes. The robes were perhaps white, but under the red light they took on the general color of the room.

For a moment the men stood silent and looked at Billy, and then advanced toward him, while Billy, at the same moment, rose to face them.

"Broadway Billy—"

"Present," responded Billy, promptly, cutting short whatever the man was going to say.

"I am not calling the roll," observed the man, "so you need not be so prompt with your interruption."

"Beg pardon," said Billy, "but you spoke my name, an' when anybody mentions my name in my hearin' I'm goin' ter chip in an' have my say."

"Then you own that you are Broadway Billy, do you?"

"Bet yer life I do. This is me, clear down to th' foundation."

"Good! We were sure of you, however, so

your admission does not go for much. We know you well, my boy."

"That is th' reason that I don't try ter deny my 'dentity."

While these words were being exchanged the seven men advanced to the stools, and each had taken in hand one of the swords.

The man who had been doing the talking was evidently the chief of the band, or at any rate their spokesman. He soon proved that he was their leader.

"Be seated," he ordered, waving his sword, "and this case shall be presented for consideration."

The other six sat down.

The chief then, with the point of his sword, disturbed some of the bones directly under the light, and a square block was disclosed to view.

"Boy, take your stand upon that block," he then ordered.

"Is it warranted safe an' sound, an' not liable to blow up nor go down, nor nothin' o' that—"

A prod with the sword caused Billy to cut short his questions and obey the order in a hurry.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed, "you hadn't order do that; don't you know that thing is sharp? An' you hit me in a tender place, too. You orter be more careful."

"And you want to learn to hold your tongue and obey orders without questioning. Do you know into whose hands you have fallen?"

"Can't say that I do, unless it is into th' hands of the Philistines," was the response.

"You will find that you have fallen into even worse hands," the chief declared. "You are in the power of the Sworn Seven."

"You don't say so!"

"Boy, it is no time for you to jest—"

"Jest so, sir. That is what I was thinkin', an' so I'll make it a p'int not ter do it."

"Will you hold your tongue?"

"I'll try hard, if it will oblige ye."

"It will oblige us, and it will be better for you. Now pay attention to what I have to say."

"I'm all ears, as th' jack— But, I was goin' ter hold my tongue. I almost forgot about that."

If Billy felt any alarm at his critical position, he did not allow them to see it. He seemed as unconcerned as if out upon the street, instead of in the power of these Seven Sons of Satan.

"Enough of this," snapped the chief sharply; "listen to me. We are seven men who have sworn to rid this city of some of its detectives, and you are one whose name we have on our black-list."

"Whew!" whistled Billy. "Is that so?"

The chief raised his sword in a threatening manner.

"You are one," he repeated, "but, owing to your youth, we are willing to give you one chance for your life. You may take your choice of two evils. One is, certain death; and the other, to have your eyes put out and your tongue cut out. Now, which do you prefer? You are at liberty to talk."

It was a desperate situation for Broadway Billy.

CHAPTER II.

BROADWAY BILLY'S DOOM.

"KIN I orate, now?" Billy naively asked.

"You are at liberty to say what you please," the chief assured.

"Thank you! There is nothin' that I enjoy so much as the liberty o' speech. I don't know what I would do if I couldn't talk at all. It would be awful, and no error about that. You see they got a tongue o' th' female gender inter my head by mistake, an' I can't keep it still ter save me. It will go, an' there's no stoppin' it, unless ye tie up my talker."

"I have suggested a remedy for it," the chief interrupted.

"Ter cut it out?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't think o' sich a thing. Why, in my case th' remedy would be a heap wuss than th' disease. Ye see I have got so used ter talkin' that I ruther enjoy it. Oh, no, not any of that, if you please. An' as fer havin' my eyes put out too, that is altogether out o' th' question. No, sir-ee!"

"Then you prefer certain death?"

"Every time."

"Then that is settled. You have had your choice."

"You see," the plucky boy rattled on, "life wouldn't be worth th' livin', if I had neither

eyes ner tongue, so I'd rather shuffle off th' coil right ter once, an' have it over with."

"Let me remind you," the chief of the Seven warned, "that you need not hope for a chance to effect your escape. You are well known to us, and we know that you have as many lives as a cat, apparently. We intend to make sure of death this time, as you have chosen death."

"That is all right," responded Billy, "don't let your minds be troubled about me. If you mean biz, an' I reckon you do, all that I ask is that you will give me a decent send-off; no torture about it, you know."

"So it shall be. In fact, I think we can let you choose the manner of your death."

"That will be decent of you."

"What say ye, members of the Sworn Seven?" the chief inquired of the others; "shall we give him the choice?"

"Yes," they answered; "it can make little difference to us."

"You hear the decision, boy."

"You bet," returned the gamin; "and I thank you. I hope you won't go back on yer word, now."

"No fear of that; you have our promise."

"That's good. Now you want me to name th' manner of my takin' off, I should say."

"Exactly."

"An' it must be a way that will be a sure death to yours truly."

"Of course; that is understood."

"Very well, you kin turn me out an' let me die of old age. That is about as sure a way as I kin think of, off hand."

The seven rascals had to laugh.

"That will not do," declared the chief. "This is no time for nonsense, and you know well enough what we mean."

"Jest what I expected," cried Billy, indignantly. "You haven't kept yer word with me at all. You left th' choice ter me, an' then when I'd made it you won't agree ter it. How is a feller ter know how ter take ye?"

"Well, but it must be death, prompt and immediate."

"That is what that is, when it overtakes a feller, ain't it? Seems ter me you are mighty hard ter suit."

"Boy, let us have no more fooling. Make your choice, and whatever it is, it shall be accepted, barring your first choice."

"You mean that?"

"Yes."

"All right, you kin take me over an' drown me in th' Red Sea."

"Bosh!—to the Red Sea part of it, anyhow; but if you prefer to be drowned, we will dispose of you that way. What do you say? We will parley no longer."

"Drown it is, then. But, you are a purty set o' galoots, you be! Ye ain't men o' yer word at all. You gave me a choice that wasn't no good after all. But, go on with th' funeral; I kin stand it if th' rest of th' fambly kin. Let me tell ye that ye want ter make a sure job of it, though, for if ye don't, I will make it hot fer ye."

"My lad," the chief remarked, "you are as brave as a lion, and it is really too bad that you haven't led a different life. We would be proud to make use of you in our line of business, if we didn't know you so well. But, there is no use talking about that."

"Right you are," agreed Billy, "so ye needn't make no offers ter me."

"Do not expect any; we know you too well. But, as I was about to say, you are nervy, and would be a credit to our profession. You would grow up to be one of the best leaders ever known. It is too bad that you are nothing better than a contemptible police spy."

"We hold different opinions on that p'int," Billy observed.

"That is the truth, and it is for that reason that your doom is sealed. It would never do for us to allow Broadway Billy, the boy detective, to become a detective full grown. You would be a terror, or I miss my guess. Why, you are a professional already."

"Don't," protested Billy, "please don't. You will make me vain, I am afraid. I can't stand flattery, an' never could. But, it strikes me that it don't speak very well for my cuteness, ter see me in your power, an' ter think how easily I walked inter th' trap."

"The trap we laid for you, my boy, might have fooled an older hand than you. It was well planned, and well carried out."

This was true. Billy had been cleverly duped; but, the particulars of that have little to do with our story. We have to deal with the results.

"As for flattery," the chief continued, "you can stand that, seeing that your time on earth

is to be short. It is likely to be the last that you will ever hear. I do not know how it will be with you on the other side, however."

"It will be a heap better with me than it will with you," was the boy's retort, "an' you kin bet high on that."

"We will not discuss that point. I was complimenting you on your nerve. You have plenty of it. Why, we have had men in this room who have quaked with fear at the very sight of the skulls and bones, but you have not minded them at all. What are you made of, anyhow?"

"What be I made of? Now you hit me hard. I am built of iron, steel, and Injy rubber. I am like a cat, too, in one respect: I have nine lives. What is more, I haven't lost one of 'em yet. Th' only thing that I really lack is brain. If I had a little o' that I should be happy."

"You will not have long to mourn over your deficiency. In a few hours you will be lying still and cold at the bottom of New York Bay. We cannot oblige you by taking you to the Red Sea, as you desired, but we will do the next best thing we can. You shall be drowned in the most approved style."

"Thanks," said Billy. "When a feller can't get just what he wants he should be thankful ter git what he kin. Your kindness shall never be forgotten."

"No need to say anything more about it. In a few hours we will come for you, and then you will take your last ride. In the mean time you can remain here and enjoy yourself as best you can."

Billy stepped down to the floor and the men prepared to leave the room.

"Hadh't we better make his hands a little more secure?" one inquired.

"Perhaps we had," agreed the chief; "bring a little wire."

One of the Seven produced some wire. This was twisted around Billy's arms in addition to the string that already held them. There was little chance for him to get his hands free.

"There, now I guess we can trust you," the chief remarked, "and we will take our leave. In about two hours it will be midnight, and then you may look for our return. Be prepared to meet your doom."

At that instant the lights went out, and the room was plunged in total darkness. Billy heard a hurried movement of feet, then a clicking of the closing door, and he was left alone there in the dark.

He felt around until he found one of the stools, and sat down, to reflections not pleasant.

"Sweet pertaters!" his thoughts ran, "but I am in a mess o' pickle this time fer sure. Th' chances is that this will be my last adventure. Skinny will have a chance ter drape th' stand in mournin' an' wear a big band on his hat. It seems that I ain't goin' ter git no chance ter escape, and I'll have ter face th' music, whatever it is. Better death than th' other, though, an' there ain't no doubt in my mind but they meant real old business. None o' that fer William o' Broadway. If it is ter be death, I'll go down with my eyes an' tongue. No use tryin' ter git my hands loose, fer they have done me up fer keeps. I kin only set down an' await my doom, jest as that feller said. It is hard ter be taken off in my youth an' beauty, but it is purty sartin that I would have ter go sooner or later, anyhow, so I don't know as it makes much difference. I'd like ter say good-by ter mom an' Skinny, though."

Billy's thoughts were sad enough, but he did not remain long idle. He went around and around the room, trying in vain to find the door, hoping that by some means or other he might get out. Nor was his brain idle. He was trying hard to concoct a plan for escape, but no feasible method of escape could he conceive, and the two hours passed away.

Suddenly the light flashed forth from the skulls once more, and the men were in the room. Billy had not heard a sound. They were clad in the same red-hued gowns as before, and had their swords in hand.

"We have come for you," answered the chief, "and there is now no time for talk. Men, take him and bind him."

Two of the men dropped their swords and laid hold of the unhappy boy, and in a very short time they had him bound securely. A gag was in his mouth, and a bandage was over his eyes.

This done, they lifted him up and carried him from the apartment.

Along a dimly lighted hall they bore him, then down a flight of stairs, and there at the bottom of the steps was a boat into which they laid him.

All the men got into the boat, having discard-

ed their gowns, and for some time Billy heard them making their way out of some underground canal to the open river.

It took quite a while to reach the river, but at last the boat came out into the cold night air, and for half an hour or longer four of the men pulled steadily at the oars. When they stopped, Billy was put into a big sack, the sack was tied up, a heavy weight was anchored to his feet, and he was dropped silently over the side of the boat into the cold, dark waters of the bay!

CHAPTER III.

"SACRED TO THE MEMORY."

"WHAT! Broadway Billy dead!"

That exclamation was uttered by Detective Speare. He had been out of town, had just returned, and this news was a great shock to him.

And it had come upon him with the suddenness of a thunderbolt out of a clear sky—to be original.

Wanting to see Billy, he had sauntered up Broadway as far as the boys' corner-stand. Arriving there, what was his surprise to find it closed, and not only closed but heavily draped in mourning.

Immediately he knew that one of the partners was dead, and thought it must be Skinny. Glancing around to see some one of whom to inquire, however, he saw that meager individual coming toward him, and his worst fears were confirmed.

Skinny was clad in the deepest black, had a heavy band of mourning on his hat, and a bow of crape was tied around his left arm.

"Skinny, who is dead?" the detective demanded, as soon as the boy came near enough to be addressed.

"Billy is dead," was the doleful reply.

Then came the exclamation with which this chapter opens.

"Yes; poor Billy is dead," Skinny repeated.

"When did he die; and what was the cause?" the detective impatiently questioned.

"We don't know just when he was killed—"

"Killed!"

"Drowned, sir."

"Then the brave fellow met with foul play at last, did he? But he shall be avenged, as surely as I can do it. Go on and tell me all about it."

"You see he has been missin' about two weeks, an' yesterday his body was found floatin' in th' river."

"Too bad, too bad. But are you sure there is no mistake in the identity?"

"I guess it is him, sure enough. His mom says it is, an' I think so, too. She knows him mostly by a scar on one arm. Can't go much on th' looks, fer th' body is all bloated up, an' th' fish or somethin' has disfigured it a good deal."

"Poor Billy! so brave, noble, and true; he was deserving of better things. I had great hopes in his future. It is a sad thing. Is the body at his home?"

"Yes; an' th' funeral is ter take place this afternoon."

"I will go there at once!"

"I will go with ye, jest as soon as I see if everything is all right around here."

Skinny examined the locks, and soon was ready.

"Have the police taken the case in hand?" Speare inquired, as they walked along.

"Yes, they are tryin' ter find out somethin' about it."

"And they have questioned you, to get hold of a clew?"

"Yes, they have pumped me dry," Skinny declared, "but I am afraid that I did not help them much. You see, I didn't know where Billy was goin'. He started off one evenin', sayin' that he would be back in about an hour, an' that was th' last that was seen of him alive."

"How long had he been missing before you reported the case?"

"Two days. You see, he was in th' habit o' goin' off like that, an' we expected that he would show up at any time."

"And next day you told the police."

"Yes. Billy had some 'portant biz ter attend to that mornin', an' when he wasn't on hand we thought somethin' must be wrong, fer sure. Billy was purty prompt in biz, you know."

"Could his mother throw any light on the mystery?"

"Not a bit. She was jest as much in th' dark as I was."

"Billy was a little reckless. He has been a marked boy for some time, as I have told him more than once, and he should have told you where he was going whenever he went away."

"That was what he 'most allus did," informed Skinny, "when he thought he was goin' inter

any danger, but he didn't, this time, an' fer that reason I think he didn't expect ter poke his nose where he hadn't orter."

"He should have been on the safe side at all times."

"If he had listened ter me," Skinny averred, "he would be all safe and sound at this minnit. Many and many a time I have warned him that sooner or later he would come ter grief, but he wouldn't listen ter me. He was allus bound ter run inter some place where he had no biz ter go, an' this time he got done up. It is too bad, an' I am mighty sorry; but it was his own fault."

Great tears came from the boy's eyes as he was talking, and rolled down his face, causing him to brush them away with his sleeves.

They talked on, the detective doing his best to draw out some point upon which to build up a clew, but failing utterly to do so; and in due time they came to the home of the lamented Billy.

The crying of Mrs. Weston could be heard as soon as they entered the hall, and when they entered the apartment where the body lay, it was sad indeed to witness the mother's grief.

Skinny's mother was there, and she was weeping, too, and it did not take long for Skinny himself to join in with them.

One or two other neighbors were also present.

Detective Speare knew Mrs. Weston, and tried to console her, but it was an impossible undertaking.

When she had become a little calm, he questioned her, but failed to get anything of value. She was only too positive in her identification of the body, and nothing he could say could arouse a doubt in her mind.

"Do you suppose that I would not know my own boy?" she demanded; and on that she stood firmly.

When Speare came to look at the body, he took plenty of time to do it. He had known Billy for a long time, and wanted to settle this important question to his own satisfaction, if he could.

As Skinny had said, the body was very much mutilated, so as to render recognition difficult.

The detective studied the dead form long and earnestly. It was certainly of Billy's height, and, as near as he could tell, the proportions had been his. The color of the hair was the same. There was certainly reason to suppose that this was the body of the missing boy, and, taking all the facts of the case into consideration, especially the positive assertion of the bereaved mother, he decided that it was indeed the brave and noble Billy.

One thing perhaps more than all else led the detective to this conclusion, and that was something that, in his mind, amounted to almost proof positive. He knew that Billy had had scars on his wrists, caused by burns that he had received by holding his hands over a lighted candle, on one occasion, to burn off cords with which they were bound. One of the hands of the body before him was in good condition, and on the wrist was a scar similar to the ones Billy had carried. This, with Mrs. Weston's recognition of the scar on the arm further up, seemed conclusive; Broadway Billy was dead!

Finding that all had been done that could be done, the detective went to Headquarters.

"Speare, I am glad to see you," was the greeting he got from the chief. "I have bad news for you, however," he added.

"You refer to poor Broadway Billy?"

"You have heard about it, then."

"Yes, and I have been to see the body."

"Ha! that is good. I was anxious for your return, so that we could have your opinion regarding the identity. Billy was well known to you. What do you say? Is the body his?"

"I have decided that it is."

"So we all agree. It is a sad thing, for I had big hopes in the future of that boy. He was a detective bred and born. He has done work that none of you might be ashamed of."

"You are right. It is truly a sad event. Is there any clew to the case? Is there any hope of bringing the murderers to account?"

"Speare, it is a mystery profound. That boy left his partner at their stand one evening, saying that he would be back in about an hour, and never returned. The next that was known of him was when his body was found floating in the river. Now the first great question to be settled is, where did he set out to go to on that evening? If we can only learn that, we may get a start toward learning the truth of the matter."

"It is a difficult case. But, we will tackle it—at any rate I will. Sooner or later some of the crooks of the town will let out something about it, and then we can go for them. It may

take a long time, but we will get there. I have sworn that he shall be avenged, and I will keep my vow!"

"Good for you! That is just what I expected of you. You will attend the funeral?"

"Most assuredly."

"Keep your eyes open and see who is around."

"Trust me for that."

"I know that I can do so. Others will be on hand for the same purpose."

That afternoon the funeral took place. It was largely attended, especially by detectives and others who had known Billy well. It was a funeral that made Skinny, the lean partner, feel proud. Sad as the occasion was, he could not help glorying in the fact that Billy was having "just a boss send-off."

At the same time the grief of the thin partner was genuine and intense, and he wept continuously. It need not be said that the same was the case with the mother. Skinny's mother was with her, but no words could comfort her.

The carriages of several rich families were in attendance, containing persons for whom Billy had rendered service that could never be repaid in full. No need to name them all.

The detectives who were present had an eye open in every direction, and made mental note of every known face they saw. This was their best—their only chance, and they must make the most of it.

A splendid resting-place had been selected for the much-loved Billy, and he was laid away with all the respect that could have been shown a greater person.

No need to dwell longer upon the sad occasion. A few days later a handsome stone marked the spot, upon which were these words:

"Erected in memory of

WILLIAM WESTON (Broadway Billy),

One of the best, truest, bravest, most generous and most promising boys of New York City; by his friends, as a mark of their sincere regard."

CHAPTER IV.

"HERE'S A STATE OF THINGS."

SEVEN men were seated in a room that was locked and barred.

But they were not prisoners. The locks and bars were on the inside, and the men were there of choice.

It was not a large room, but it was well furnished and appointed, and had the appearance of a club-room on a small scale. The men were seated around a table on which were wines, open boxes of cigars, and cards. They were playing, smoking and talking, and evidently enjoying the fleeting hour.

But why the bolts and bars?

Let us give the men a little closer attention.

One, who had the air of command about him, was a man about forty years of age, of powerful build, wearing a full beard. He was rather good-looking than otherwise, and was well and tastefully dressed. He was an easy and fluent talker, educated, and from his manner was clearly used to good society.

The others were less favored in the respects named. Their ages ranged from twenty-five to forty-five, and most of them were hard-featured. That is to say, the unmistakable stamp of the criminal was upon them. This was more prominent with the older ones than with the younger.

A game at cards had just been ended, and the individual first described was leaning back in his chair, and laughing heartily as he lighted a fresh cigar.

"That is the third time I have won," he remarked. "What is the trouble with the rest of you? You do not seem to 'get there' at all to-night. Ha, ha, ha!"

"We will get there, though, Captain Iron-grip," returned one of the others in rather a dissatisfied tone, "an' don't ye forgit it. We'll see how it will go the next round."

"It is no use, Crackers," the first speaker, still laughing, rejoined; "this is my night, and there is no use bucking against me. I guess we'd better stop. I do not want to win from you, anyhow."

It was a peculiar name, "Crackers," but so the name was called. He was never found without crackers in his pockets, and was always munching upon them. His companions declared that he never ate anything else. Hence his nickname.

"We won't have it that way," Crackers stout-

ly declared; "we want satisfaction out o' you, captain, an' we're bound ter have it."

"Well, if you are determined, we will proceed, but it will be sure loss to you, I feel it in my bones."

"We'll take our chances on that. Deal 'em out, Mousey."

This was the nickname of another of the band. Mousey was a young man of say twenty-five. He looked older, and his face was thin and wan, the result of his career of late hours, drinking, and the rest of the round of dissipation. He was called by that pretty name on account of his deftness at pocket-picking. Not that mice are at all expert in that line, but they are generally conceded to be crafty and cunning in their depredations.

Mousey took the cards and began to shuffle them, preparatory for another battle with the magic pasteboards, as they are sometimes called.

"We will have just this one game more," further observed Captain Iron-grip, "and then we will come to a little business that we have on hand. Some of you know what I mean. Let them run, Mousey."

"All right," agreed another of the players, who was known as "Short-legs," "let it be just as you say, captain; you are the boss."

The game progressed, but the talking did not cease.

"By the way," Captain Iron-grip presently observed, "I have had the pleasure of attending a funeral since I have seen any of you."

"That is a new way ter have pleasure, I must say," one of the Seven laughingly remarked.

"I have an idee that I was at th' same funeral," put in Short-legs.

"That so?" from the captain.

"Yes."

"Well, whose was it? I did not see you there."

"You mebbly seen me, but you didn't know me. You don't s'pose that I'd went there without a disguise, do you? No, sir. Why, them long-noses would 'a' spotted me in no time."

"But what funeral are you talking about?" the captain persisted.

"Why, th' funeral o' that little terror, Broadway Billy."

"What, has he been found?" some of the others exclaimed.

"Yes, the body has turned up," informed the captain, "and that is the funeral to which I referred."

"I thought so," chuckled Short-legs.

"Why didn't ye tell us about it?" demanded the others.

"Why don't ye read th' papers?" was the counter-question.

"I didn't think that chunk o' meat would ever come up," another remarked.

"No, ner me," agreed the sullen Crackers, "fer it was about th' surest work o' th' kind that I ever had a hand in. That weight orter 'a' kept the body down there till th' day o' resurrection, or even longer."

"Crabs has done it," theorized Mousey.

"It don't matter what done it," Short-legs summed up, "that boy is forever out o' th' way, an' we have one less detective terror to buck against."

"Right you are."

"But, be ye sure it was him?"

"There is not a particle of doubt about the matter," decided the captain. "We know that the lad died sure enough, and his friends and relatives know that he is not only dead, but decently buried. Of course the manner of his taking off is a mystery to them, and so it ever will be."

At this point Crackers sprung up with a loud imprecation, dashed his cards down upon the table, and declared that he would never play another hand. He had lost another game.

Again Captain Iron-grip lay back in his chair and laughed.

Crackers was not the right sort of person to play at cards. If he won he was forever boasting of it, and if he lost he could not hold his temper. He was ever at the extreme, one way or the other.

A great deal of laughing and joking followed, in neither of which Crackers took any part, and when it had in a measure subsided the captain looked at his watch and his manner changed from gay to serious.

Throwing aside his nearly finished cigar, he rose from his chair, saying:

"Well, we have had enough of this: now to business. Turn down the lights and come into the other room."

The manner of all the others changed, too, and they rose to obey.

The lights were lowered, as directed, and the commander led the way to one end of the room, where he opened a door, and they all entered into the apartment described in the first chapter of our story.

These men were the Sworn Seven.

The chief took his seat upon one of the black-covered stools, and the others followed his example.

Red light blazed from the hideous chandelier, and the room was the same as it has been described. No alteration had taken place in its arrangement.

Captain Iron-grip took his sword from its place in the floor, raised it, and in deep tones demanded:

"Has the League of the Sworn Seven been true since last we met?"

"We have been true!" was the response.

"And ye are still steadfast to our purposes and oaths?"

"We are."

"It is well."

The sword was lowered, and placed point to the floor, the chief using it as a rest for his hands, crossing them on the hilt.

"Men of the Seven," he then addressed them, "some of you know for what purpose we are here. To the others I will now explain the work we have in hand. To-morrow the new ocean steamship, the Ocean Queen, is expected to arrive in New York Bay. On board of her are two persons in whom we have an interest. These persons are a lady and her promised husband. We need have nothing to do with their names. When the big steamer arrives at Sandy Hook, a steam pleasure-yacht will meet her, and these persons will leave the steamer and get aboard the latter craft. Are you paying attention?"

"Yes."

"With these passengers on board, the pleasure-yacht will steam up the bay, keeping close to the Long Island shore on entering the Narrows, and afterward. At a point between the Narrows and another about opposite the Robbins Reef Light, a tug will be met. Signals will be exchanged, and everything will appear all right. As they come nearer, however, the tug will signal again, and will attempt to cross the bow of the yacht. The latter will warn the tug to hold its former course. Confusion will arise. The yacht will attempt to get out of the way, but her captain, instead of helping matters, will, in his confusion, place his craft right across the bow of the on-coming tug. There will be a crash, and the chances are that the yacht will be cut in twain."

"How in blazes do you know all that?" demanded one of the listeners, in the greatest amazement.

"Because it is our business to know it," was the quiet answer. "We are to be the principal actors in the tragedy."

"Whew!"

"Pay attention further: The lady will be rescued, but her lover will be drowned. Do you understand this?"

"We do," came the answer from those who had had previous knowledge of the matter.

"Two of you will happen to be near her when the crash comes, and it will be your business to see that no harm comes to her. Two more of you will see to it that the man goes down. The other two will be aboard the tug. And right here and now I will appoint you to your several posts."

This was quickly done.

"The regular employees of the yacht and tug are to know nothing about this little plot," the captain went on, "except the men at the wheels, and they will be paid well for their service. No danger from them will follow, for they will stand in fear of the hangman, you see. The others must take their chances."

"It is bound to work," asserted Short-legs, rubbing his hands at the prospect of the excitement.

"It must be made to work," the chief sternly ordered. "Much depends upon the success of the scheme. If one of you fails to do his part, let him beware of me. But, to go on, you can all swim, and as soon as you reach the shore you must disappear. I will take charge of the lady as soon as you leave her safe on dry ground. When—"

"Captain," interrupted one of the Seven, "there is one weak point in that, as you have laid it out."

"What is that?" Iron-grip asked.

"If you won't consider me takin' too much upon myself, I'll give you a point to consider on."

"Go right ahead, Whalebone," the captain invited; "we want the best plans we can make up for our guidance in this matter."

CHAPTER V.

THE SWORN SEVEN'S SCHEME.

"WHALEBONE," as he was called, was about the oldest man of the Seven. He had at one period of his life been a sailor, and this gave him the peculiar name he now bore, inasmuch as he had been on a whaling vessel.

Previously to that he had won distinction as a "crook" in New York, and when he tired of a seafaring life he naturally fell back into his former walk.

"What I was thinkin' on," he set out to explain, "was that I don't like th' idee o' the crews o' them crafts bein' along."

"We can't help that," said the captain; "we couldn't get along without them, and to try to do so would arouse suspicion. Don't you see that it would?"

"I reckon that you are right, an' here is th' other p'int: Wouldn't it be better fer us fellers ter be absent from th' yacht, but be on hand in a smaller boat ter take a hand in th' rescue business?"

"Why?"

"'Cause, we have ter go aboard as your party, an' you would have ter account fer us in some way. Don't ye see ye would? If you said we was drowned, you then would have ter tell who we was; an' th' same if we wasn't."

The captain was thoughtful for some time.

"I see the case," he said, "and it looks a little awkward; but, at the same time, I think I see the way around it. You must be on the tug instead of on the yacht, and from there make the rescue. The tug will assist in the work, and there need be no danger to any one but the man I have indicated."

"You are comin' at it now," agreed Whalebone, "but kin I add one more word to it?"

"Go right ahead."

"Well, I think I kin improve on th' hull thing. Why not let th' captain of th' tug ship us as his crew fer th' once, an'— But that won't do, nuther. It ain't no easy thing ter git around. I begin—"

"I have it now," the captain interrupted, "and there need be no more parley over it. The plan will remain the same, except that I will reduce the force, and will not have any of you on the tug."

"How will you do it that way?"

"Two of you, Mousey and Bob, will go on the yacht. You will not know me, but will go along as friends of the expected man. I will give you his name later on. There will be others there, of course, but you need not mingle with them. Be well dressed, and wear all the airs you can, but don't overdo it. Both of you are good swimmers. Make sure of your work, and then get to shore. It will be thought that you drowned. No one will know who you were. I will make it my business to rescue the lady. The tug will put forth every effort to save the others. The captains, well paid, and afraid to let out the truth, will make up a story of misunderstanding of signals. Can any of you add to that?"

"That is jest th' ticket," agreed Whalebone immediately.

"Nothin' is th' matter with that," said Shortlegs, "but where does our share of th' fun an' profits come in?"

"You will have to lose the fun," answered the captain, "but I will pay you all just as though you were taking part in the scheme. Isn't that fair?"

"That is fair," acknowledged Crackers, "seein' that ye can't use us."

"And you all agree to it?"

"We do."

"It is well. And now, men of the League of the Sworn Seven, pledge yourselves to secrecy in regard to the matter, and swear that you will remain true to our oaths and purposes."

Each man took up the sword that was in front of him, and repeated after the chief a most blood-curdling oath of allegiance to him, and submission to his orders, no matter what they might be.

"It is well," Captain Iron-grip said again, when they had sat down. "Be true to me and to each other, and I will make you all rich; be false, and— But you know what to look for in that case, and you know my power."

It was clear that the six men were completely under his authority, and that they were afraid of him. It was equally clear that they had confidence in him, and were only too glad to serve him. Further, they had mutual interests that made it binding upon them to remain true to each other.

"Our interests is common," owned Mousey, "an' we are bound ter hang together fer our own good."

"If we don't," asserted the captain, "we shall surely hang together for the good of the public at large, and that you may depend on."

This mild joke brought a laugh from them all.

Much more was said, and the whole plan for the intended dastardly crime of the morrow was talked over and over until it was made as perfect as they could make it.

When they were about done and ready to leave that chamber of horrors, the chief inquired:

"By the way, you must all be as wary as old foxes in regard to that case of the boy, and also that other one."

"No need ter tell us ter do that," answered the one called Bob.

"No harm done to remind you of it. Use your utmost caution. What is the prospect of another victim in that line?"

"We have our eyes on two or three of 'em," was the reply, "an' may make a haul at any time. We are after 'em, an' we will pay 'em up fer th' pards o' ours that is jugged up th' river."

"Good! Go for them whenever you have a chance, and I will help you all I can. Well, we must break up, for I have an engagement, and it is near ten o'clock."

A certain form was then gone through with, there in the presence of those awful skeletons, a form that was impressive for the others, but which was all bosh to the chief; and then the lights were turned out, and they returned to the room where we first found them.

There the captain left them, after again reminding them of the great importance of the work of the morrow.

What if they had known that their entire talk had been overheard, cautious as they had been, and secure as they felt themselves?

Such was the truth. There had been a listener, and for them a most dangerous one.

Who was it?

Under the floor of the very place in which they had been assembled, lying flat on his stomach in the dust and dirt, where at a glance it would seem that there was barely space for a cat to crawl, was the form of a boy.

And that boy was— Broadway Billy? Does the reader so guess? If so, then the reader, usually quick to guess aright, is for the once mistaken. How could it be, with such proof that Billy was dead? No, it was not he.

For a moment let us digress, and look at the fate Billy had met. Bound hand and foot with wire, tied up in a sack, a heavy weight attached to his feet, he had been dropped at midnight into the deep, dark waters of New York Bay. Could he be otherwise than dead? Further, his body had been found, positively identified, and buried.

No, this boy who had overheard the plot of the Sworn Seven was not Broadway Billy. In truth, it would have been utterly impossible for Billy to have gained access to the place this boy was in.

The beams and floor were but very little above the ground, and the whole space between was almost filled with dirt and rubbish of all sorts. It was a stifling, foul-smelling hole, a good den for rats—and there were many of them around, but not a fit place for any human being to enter. But, any one would have asserted that it would have been an utter impossibility for any one to enter there, however much he might have desired to do so, and no matter how small he might be.

Still it was proved not to be impossible, for here was this boy, alive and in sound condition of mind and body, lying there in the manner described.

But, who was he? and what had brought him there?

That boy was none other than Skinny, Broadway Billy's shadow-like partner!

Some hours earlier in the evening Skinny had been attending to business at the corner stand, and, at the same time, attending to a hot supper which his mother had carried to him. As Skinny was now practically alone in the management of that extensive business, it required all his time, and he could not get away to either dinner or supper.

He was eating away, talking to his mother as he did so, stopping frequently to wait upon customers as they came up.

The pair were discussing the future, wondering what action Billy's mother would want to take in regard to the business, when a young man of about twenty-five came along, glanced at the stand, appearing to take in its extensive draping with a good deal of interest.

He was a thin and pale young fellow, looking older than he evidently was, and Skinny was

not at all favorably impressed with his appearance.

He stopped, stepped up, and inquired:

"Who is dead, young feller?"

"My pardner," Skinny answered.

"Your pardner, eh?" with a slight smile that caused Skinny to bate him most heartily.

"Yes," he answered.

"I think I knowed him," the young man went on, again showing his teeth in a death-like grin; "what did he die of?"

"It wasn't with softenin' o' th' brain, anyhow," Skinny made reply, throwing something of Billy's manner into the words.

"Mebby it was too much smartness," the fellow suggested, in a way that made Skinny instantly suspicious, and with another of his Satanic grins he turned away.

Skinny's breath came hard and fast. For the first time in his life he felt a touch of the real detective fever upon him. Did this fellow know anything about Billy's fate? If he lost sight of him now he might never see him again, and would never know. It was now or never.

"Tend ter biz, mom," he cried; "I am goin' after that feller like hot shot. I want ter know where he roosts, as Billy uster say. If I don't git back at closin' time, shut up shop an' go home."

His mother was about to protest, but Skinny did not wait to hear what she had to say. Grabbing his hat, he darted away like a veritable shadow after the man he wanted to keep in sight.

He followed the man to a miserable-looking den on a miserable street, saw him enter, and wanted to know more. He looked around, and finally found a very small hole in the foundation. Into that he squeezed himself, hoping that he might hear something of interest. He could not have done better, if he had had a dozen ways to select from. What his success was has been told.

CHAPTER VI

EXPECTANT PLEASURE.

WHEN the conversation in the room ceased, as recorded, and the men separated, the under-the-floor spy drew a long breath of relief and gave utterance to an ejaculation, "Great ginger!"

"Well, of all th' things that I ever thought about or ever dreamed about," he finally managed to mutter to himself, "this just takes the lead. What would Billy say if— But, poor Billy! he is gone, and there is no bringing him back. But, whew! here I have got th' hull thing right in my hands, an' all I have got ter do is ter unwind it to th' detectives, as Billy would say, and they will have their men. That will be jest glorious. But, who in th' world would ever thought o' me turnin' detective? I'll be hanged if I kin wonder now at th' way Billy uster like it. Why, I would wade inter blood right up ter my neck, now, ter bring them fellers ter 'count! Why, it is so surprisin' that I kin hardly believe that I ain't dreamin'!"

And indeed it was enough to stagger him. This was his first adventure of the kind, of so serious a nature, at any rate, and here he had not only learned of the fate of his partner, but held information regarding another plot that would no doubt prove the saving of a life and bring its projectors to account.

"Poor Billy! if he could only see me now," Skinny lamented, "what would he say? It would strike him dumb an' foolish. He wouldn't know what to make of it, I ruther guess. But"—and a long sigh ended the vain speculation.

Some of the villains were gone, and Skinny now began to think about getting out of his close quarters and placing the information he had gained into hands that could turn it to account.

Creeping along under the floor, he was, ere long, under the first room of the den, where some of the men had resumed their drinking, smoking, and card-playing.

Here he listened for some time to their conversation, but, failing to learn anything of interest to him, and anxious to get away, he continued to wiggle his way toward the hole where he had found entrance.

There was a wall in the way, some of the distance, which inclosed what the boy thought must be a cellar, and which he had not encountered in coming in. It took time and trouble for him to get around that, and once he got into a place where he thought he was certainly stuck fast; but he got loose again, and went on in his search for the outlet.

Finally he found it, and putting his head out

with caution, he took a survey of the alley upon which the hole opened.

The coast was clear, and, after something of an effort, he got through and started away, but first having made doubly sure of the house, so that he could find it at another time without any trouble.

"Of all things queer and strange," he muttered, as he hastened along, "this is th' queerest an' strangest that ever happened ter me. If any one had told me this mornin' that I was goin' to step inter Billy's shoes an' be a detective, I would 'a' got mad at him, I have no doubt; but here I am, sure as I am born. But, land o' goodness! I kin never make such a rip-smorter as he was, that is flat. What I kin do, though, is ter avenge him, an' if I don't do it, it will be 'cause I don't live long enough ter put this case inter th' hands o' Speare, th' detective."

"Hello! it is after ten o'clock!" as he saw a clock in a window; "mom must 'a' shut up shop long afore this an' gone home. I reckon she has been as nervous as kin be about me, same as Billy's mom uster be about him, but I can't help that now. I have biz on hand that won't be put off, an' it has got ter be done. Oh! if I could only put th' case inter Billy's hands! Poor Billy! poor Billy!"

So he rattled on, his tongue going almost as fast as Billy's had been wont to go, but what he said lacked that spark that Billy's quaint expressions always had.

"Poor Billy, poor Billy!" he repeated now and then. "Th' last fix that he got inter, th' time that he was carried up in th' balloon, tied to it by th' feet, I told him ter look out fer th' next one. I told him that one more case would wind him up, an' I went right off then an' bought stuff ter drape th' stand with when th' 'casion should come. But I wasn't lookin' fer it so soon. It kem awful sudden. But it was jest what might 'a' been expected, after all. An' yet I don't blame him, fer it is a kind o' 'trac-tive work, when ye git inter it in dead earnest."

Thus he kept up the train of thought, talking in an undertone to himself, and almost before he knew it he was opposite the corner where his place of business was located.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "be hanged if I ain't here a'ready! Mom has shut up, I see, an' gone home. I'll see if she has made everything secure, an' then I'll go an' let her know that I am safe, an' then fer th' detective. Won't I—Heavens! what is that?"

Skinny was crossing the street to where the corner stand was, when he suddenly saw something that caused his hair to rise on end, and almost turned the blood to ice in his veins—if his sensations went to indicate anything.

"Who is the person, Hannah?"

"Mr. Bertrand Wellingford, ma'm."

"Oh! indeed; show him into the parlor, and I will be down immediately."

It was in a splendid house on one of the finest avenues of the great city. A ring at the bell had just been answered by a servant, and a gentleman inquired for Lady Hamptden.

It was not an early hour of the evening, being after ten o'clock, and a short time later would have found the house closed for the night.

As it was, Lady St. Gerome Hamptden had gone up to her room, having just parted with the last of the many callers who had been coming and going during the evening, for this was one of her "at home" days.

When the servant went up to inform her that yet another caller was at the door, it was with something of a tone of impatience that she inquired who it was.

As soon as she heard the name, however, her manner changed.

The servant returned and showed the gentleman into the parlor, and in a very short time Lady Hamptden made her appearance.

She was a woman about fifty years of age, rather fleshy, but still retaining much of her youth in looks and manner. She was dressed in an evening robe of the very latest fashion, and her movements were those of grace and polished elegance. Her presence was commanding and her bearing queenly, but she had withal an air of loveliness that was altogether motherly.

Bertrand Wellingford was upon his feet the instant she entered the room, and bowed before her with Chesterfieldian grace.

He was about forty years of age, as one might guess, wore a full beard, and was rather good-looking. He was above the medium size, and was of powerful build. But, where have we seen him before? Surely he is not—cannot be—No, that idea must be dismissed. Captain Iron-grip of the Sworn Seven could never gain entrance into this home. And yet, there was a

striking resemblance. Could it possibly be he?

"Lady Hamptden," he hastened to apologize, "I humbly ask your pardon for so late a call, but I assure you that it could not be helped. I have been pushed with business—business that admitted of no putting off, and have had to hurry to get here at all. I sincerely hope—"

"My dear Wellingford," the lady interrupted, as she gave him her hand, "do not mention it. If you have carried out all the requests that I heaped upon you when you were here yesterday, it is a wonder that you were not too tired out to come. Pray be seated in the easiest place you can find, and rest."

"Thanks," the man responded, as he sat down. "To carry out your instructions has been only a pleasure, I assure you, but I confess that I began to think that I was not competent to do it, for it was not until within the past hour that my efforts were crowned with success. To engage a suitable yacht for the purpose was next to an impossibility."

"But you have been successful?"

"Entirely so, I am proud to say."

"Then I can never sufficiently thank you. I knew that if any one could do it, you were the person, and I see that my confidence was not misplaced. Please accept my hearty thanks until you are better paid."

"I assure that your approval of what I have done more than repays me for my efforts," was the return.

"What kind of boat have you engaged?"

"Just what you indicated; a pretty steam yacht."

"Good! And you have arranged for a dinner aboard of her?"

"I have."

"And the wine? and the ice cream? and—"

"Everything that you mentioned has been provided for. If there is any failure in any direction, it will not be owing to neglect of mine."

"Thank you, thank you. I will not inquire now about the terms, further than to ask if the amount I gave you will be sufficient to defray the expense."

"It will be more than sufficient."

"Very well, then you need make no account of the amount to me. I know there will not be a great deal left out of the thousand dollars, and you may do what you like with it—divide it among the employees of the yacht, or anything else."

"If you desire it."

It was the only way in which the lady could offer him payment for the service he had rendered.

Bertrand Wellingford was far from rich, but he was of good family—an English family, and had the entrance to Lady Hamptden's home. That lady knew his circumstances, for she was well acquainted with the family, and she aided him whenever she had opportunity.

"I would willingly pay much more," the lady went on to say, "for the satisfaction of giving my daughter such a welcome home. I am sure that she will be delighted, and it will be a surprise for her. To be met away down in the bay and taken on board of a pleasure yacht, where a dinner will be all prepared, is an honor indeed. And, not only that, but it will relieve her of the tedious waiting in the river. She will be here in the house long before the ship will be ready to discharge her passengers at the pier."

"In all of which you are quite correct," agreed Wellingford. "And," he added, "not only will it be an agreeable surprise for your daughter but it will be showing an extra honor to your prospective son-in-law."

"I am not unmindful of that, but I assure you that my daughter is first in my thoughts. And now, what about the hour? You are master of the whole affair, you must not forget."

"That is altogether uncertain," Wellingford answered. "The Ocean Queen may arrive in the forenoon, afternoon, or evening. All that I can say is, be ready, and I will come for you at the proper hour. Or, if you would like, you can go aboard the boat early in the morning, and make a day of it. It will be a pleasant day's excursion for you and the others."

"Just the plan! That is what we will do."

Some further conversation followed, in which the arrangements were fully discussed, and then the man took his leave.

CHAPTER VII.

A MYSTERY HERE.

"Sweet pertaters!"

Wonder of wonders! Broadway Billy alive! Could such a thing be possible? Assuredly

not—and yet that exclamation was his, and no one else could utter it with such vim and telling effect.

But how? In what manner? How was it pos—

Broadway Billy was both dead and alive. To his friends he was dead, but to us and himself he lived.

"Sweet pertaters! Where be I, anyhow?"

It was some hours after the attempted murder.

Where he was he could not tell. What had happened he did not for the moment remember.

He found himself lying upon an exceedingly narrow bed, in very narrow quarters, for the room was only about six feet across, and about seven in length. Perhaps it would have proved even smaller by actual measure. Opposite to where the boy lay was another bed, similar to the one he was on, and the space between was only two feet or less wide.

The floor was carpeted with a soft rug, and the bed was soft and easy. In height, the room was only about five feet at the center, and it ran down in a sharp curve to only two feet high at the back part of the beds.

At the head of the beds, too, it was lower than at the foot. At the higher end there was a small door, now closed.

For some minutes the lad looked around him in bewilderment, unable to recall anything that had happened, but soon the events through which he had passed came to his mind like a flash.

He remembered it all, even to the being thrown overboard, and the sensations he had felt when going down to the bottom of New York Bay.

"Be I alive? or been't I?" he quaintly questioned. "How be I ter tell? Mebbly I am aboard th' craft that is ter convey me ter th' happy huntin'-grounds, as th' Injuns say. I dunno, I'm sure. One thing that I do know, though, is that I don't feel pooty good. That makes me think that I'm alive more'n anything else. If I was dead, an' had kem ter life in th' hereafter, I'd expect ter feel mighty good. My breather don't seem ter work with any degree o' smoothness about it. Th' valves an' what-nots don't seem ter work as they'd order, an' I feel weak. That ain't th' condition ter look fer in t'other world, as I understand it, an' hence I conclude that I am not dead yet, even if they did try ter do me up."

So he reasoned it out.

"But, goodness me, how sore I be!" he exclaimed, as he tried to raise himself up, "and how mighty weak! I'll bet that I've been through some sort of a narrer hole, an' had th' closest shave fer life that I ever had. Guess I'll take it easy, an' lay right here till somebody comes in ter see me. It is clear ter my way o' thinkin' that somebody has saved my worthless life, an' that that somebody is takin' care o' me. I'm heaply obliged ter him, I'm sure, an' I must remember ter tell him so, too. Wish he'd come in an' throw a little light upon matters. There is some light here, but it ain't of th' sort that I want in this case."

The light that has been mentioned came through a small square of ground glass that was set in the door.

While Billy lay thus, with all sorts of ideas flitting through his mind, the door opened and a man stepped into the apartment.

Billy looked at him, and he at Billy.

He was a man about thirty years of age, fine-looking, well-made, and about of medium size. He wore a mustache, and his hair was thick and wavy. He was dressed in a simple attire, consisting of a blue shirt and blue trousers.

"Ha! my boy, you have come to!" he exclaimed.

"I don't know much about it," answered Billy, "but I am willin' ter take yer word fer it!"

The man laughed.

"I can assure you upon the point, then," he said.

"Well, I'm glad ter know it anyhow," declared Billy, "fer, ter tell th' truth, I was a little oncertain about it. Didn't know but I'd waked up in th' sweet by an' by, an' was waitin' fer my wings ter grow. Now as you have been so kind as ter give me light on that p'int, I wish you would tell me where I am, how I kem here, an' all about it."

"Don't you think you had better wait until you are a little stronger?"

"Wait! Why, mister, if you keep me waitin' fer half an hour I'll be dead. I am jest dyin' ter know all about it. Th' last that I know anything about was when I pitched overboard in a bag, with my hands an' feet tied fast, an' a

heavy stone or somethin' of th' kind at my feet. Down I went, with a rush an' a bump, an' that is all I know about it."

"It was that 'bump' that saved your life."

"What! that bump saved my life?"

"Exactly so."

"Oh! I see. I went to th' bottom with sich a jerk that th' weight broke loose, th' bag ripped open, an' up I popped, like a stopper out o' a bottle. You happened ter come along, run me down, scooped me in, an' here I am. Ain't I right?"

"Well, hardly," answered the man, with a laugh. "You were only too well tied up, and there was no possible chance for that stone to get loose. You are right about my being on hand to scoop you in, however, as you express it."

"You git ahead o' me," confessed Billy. "I don't understand it."

"No, of course you don't. But, there, I think you have talked enough for one time. You are weaker than you think you are, and must go to sleep. You have had a narrow pull for your life, and I have got to take the best of care of you for some time to come."

"Couldn't think o' sich a thing," declared Billy. "I have got ter know th' hull fax in th' case right now, or bu'st."

He was taxing his strength to the utmost, and he knew it. He knew that what the man said was true, that he was very weak. But, he was eager to know what sort of an adventure he had been through.

The man had produced a bottle and a spoon.

"It is time for your medicine, now," he said, as he poured something from the bottle into the spoon; "here; take this, and we will talk afterward."

Billy, too weak to resist, or to care anything about it, anyhow, opened his mouth and took the dose.

For the time being that settled Billy. He tried to continue the talk, but his tongue grew thick, and in a short time he was in a deep sleep.

The man watched him with a smile.

"Poor chap," he observed, "he had a tough time of it, and I must not let him do too much talking. He is bright as a dollar, and I am anxious to learn all about him, but I must wait."

He went softly from the room, though there was little danger that the boy would wake now, closing the door after him, and Billy slept on.

The room into which the man passed was of the same shape as the one Billy was in, but it was larger. Here he could stand upright, and had room to turn about. There was a narrow table in the center, and three or four chairs.

In one of these chairs a man was seated. He was older than the one we have already seen. He had a close-cropped white beard, wore glasses, and was reading.

He looked up as the younger man entered and asked:

"Well, how is the lad?"

"He has come to," was the answer, "and I guess he will come out all right. He wanted to know everything in one question, and I had to put him to sleep in order to shut his mouth. He is a regular rattle-box."

"I thought I heard his tongue going pretty lively. Did you find out who he is?"

"No; he did not give me a chance."

"Oh, well, there will be plenty of time."

While they were talking another young man came in, entering by a door opposite to that opening into the room where Billy was sleeping.

He looked to be about twenty years of age, and seeing them all together, one would have guessed that they were father and sons.

Such was the case.

"Is everything all right, Charles?" the father asked.

"Yes," answered the younger brother, "everything is as it should be."

"I am glad to hear it. Well, sit down, boys, and read or do whatever you like for an hour. At the end of that time we will have to procure fresh air, and then we will change our position a little."

"What about the boy?" inquired the elder brother.

"We will keep him here," the father responded. "I am curious to know who he is, and why the attempted murder. He is dead to the world, and his detention here until he is fully recovered will make no difference in the case."

It was many hours before Broadway Billy awoke again, but when he did so, and had looked around and recalled where he was, he gave utterance to his same old exclamation.

The elder of the brothers had been in to see

him many times in the meanwhile, and when he heard the exclamation he entered at once.

"Hello! awake, are you?" he cheerily greeted.

"I guess so," returned Billy, "but, I can't be quite sure of it. Can't be sure of anything in these times o' resurrection. Did I go ter sleep?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. It seems ter me that you was goin' ter tell me about how ye got holt o' me, wasn't ye?"

"I believe I was. Had you not better wait, however, until you have had something to eat, and are made stronger?"

"Nary a wait!" Billy exclaimed. "If you only knowed what a fever I am in, an' what an awful nightmare I have had about it, you wouldn't ask it. I am jest dyin' ter know th' truth, th' whole truth, an' nothin' but th' truth, in th' case."

"Well, if you are as bad off as that, I will tell you."

CHAPTER VIII.

REVELATION IMMENSE.

AND he began with a question.

"My boy," he asked, "have you no suspicion as to where you are?"

"I don't reckon I have," he answered. "I am like a cat in a strange garret. I don't know t'other end from which, ez it were."

The man smiled. He had certainly found a quaint and peculiar boy.

"Have you ever heard of the Pirogue?" he asked.

"Have I ever heard of the Peeroag?" repeated Billy. "I hardly guess that I have. What is a—what is that, anyhow?"

"A pirogue? Why, it is a name applied to a certain kind of boat; properly, a canoe formed of one large tree. You may have heard it called 'porgy.'"

"Oh!" exclaimed Billy, "if you meant th' Porgy, why didn't you say so? That is th' name of that great under-water boat that th' newspapers has been puffin' about so much of late, ain't it?"

"Yes, that is what I mean; but I prefer to pronounce it my way."

"And do you mean ter tell me that I am aboard o' that strange jigger?" Billy demanded, his eyes wide open with wonderment.

"That is just the fact in the case, my lad," was the smiling answer.

"And who are you?"

"I am Captain Dauntton."

"Sweet pertaters! What would Skinny say ter this, I wonder? What would them Sworn Seven say, if they could know that I am still on my pins, an' after 'em wuss'n a dose o' p'izen? You kin bet yer life thet there is goin' ter be a time, mister, an' that—"

The man had listened in alarm to this rattling volley of words, meaningless to him, and he interrupted:

"My boy, I am afraid that your mind is wandering, and that it will not do for us to talk any longer to-day."

"Nary a wander!" Billy returned, quickly. "My thinker is all right, cap'n, an' you mustn't git skart so fast at what ye don't git th' grip onto th' first round. What I was goin' ter say was, that there was goin' ter be a time, an' that Broadway Willyum was goin' ter be th' he-hoss that would turn th' crank when he gits himself together again!"

"My stars! boy, do you mean to say that you are Broadway Billy, the hero of a hundred adventures?" the captain of the Pirogue cried.

"There is no mistake about my bein' Broadway Willyum," the young detective replied, "but as ter my bein' a hero I don't agree with ye. Th' great trouble with me is that I ain't got no brain ter speak of, an' I am allus runnin' inter some sort o' diffikilty that other folks wouldn't think o' gettin' inter. That is one sure sign that I ain't got all my buttons, I take it. Yes, I am Broadway Billy, but you don't want ter call me a hero. I deny th' charge, yer Honor."

Captain Dauntton had to laugh.

"My brother Charles will have a fit when he learns who you are," he said. "He has read a good deal about you and your escapades, and there will be no holding him."

"Better not tell him, then," Billy suggested.

"But," he added, "I'm jest dyin' ter hear all about how you saved my wu'thless life, an' all about it."

"You had better rest awhile first—"

"Nary!" protested Billy, "it is now or never. See th' state o' fever I am in. I must know th'

bull thing or you will have a corpus on your hands, an' that corpus will be about my size. Plunge right in, now, an' let's have it out."

"Very well, Billy, here goes:

"Let me begin with telling you something about the Pirogue. My father, Mr. Henry Dauntton, is a mechanic and inventor. My brother and I are machinists. Father has always been after something new in his line of labor, and spent some years in trying to invent a flying-machine. Whether he would have succeeded or not I am not prepared to say. He has a way of dropping one thing and taking up another suddenly. The flying-machine is at present 'asleep', as we speak of it."

"Father suddenly got an idea that he could make a boat that would go as well under the water as other boats go upon its surface, or even better. He tried it, with us boys to help him. We all set to work, and after several years of hard work, in which we were all deeply interested, the Pirogue was the result."

Billy was listening with mouth, eyes, and ears.

"The Pirogue is a success," the narrator went on. "We have lived aboard of her for some months now, most of the time under water—"

"Be we under water now?" Billy broke in with a question.

"Yes," was the answer, "we are at the bottom of New York Bay, about half-way between the city and Staten Island."

"Sweet pertaters! be I alive an' wide awake? or be I dead an' dreamin'? Who would thunk o' sich a thing as this fer me ter fall inter? This beats th' Dutch, this does, an' by big odds, too."

"Our invention is not yet patented," Captain Dauntton went on to say, "and so we do not enlighten the reporters who have called to see us. They see our boat, guess at its motive power, and are no wiser than one who reads Verne's great romance. Have you read that?"

"No, guess not."

"You will want to, after your experience aboard the Pirogue."

"Mebby I'll tackle it; but, how about your savin' me? That is th' p'int that interests me now. I can't grip on ter that worth a cent or two."

"Well, my boy, we will not claim the honor of having saved you, for, to tell the truth, it was more by the hand of Providence than anything else. I will tell you how it was."

"The Pirogue was lying at rest at the bottom of the bay, just as she is now, and we were about retiring to our bunks. We had just been to the surface for a supply of fresh air. Suddenly we were startled by hearing something come down upon the top of our unique habitation with considerable force. We thought it to be the anchor of some vessel."

"Fearing that some damage might have been done, we made haste to make an examination. I slipped on my diving-dress, which we keep prepared for instant use, and can put on in about thirty seconds; Charles prepared the outlet, and father turned on the lights and looked out."

"There is an oblong elevation on the middle of our boat, in the sides and ends of which are set thick plates of glass to enable us to see around us."

"As father looked out he exclaimed:

"There is something lying here on the forward end of the boat, boys, and it looks to me like the form of a human being in a sack. Make all the haste you can."

"Of course Charles and I made all the haste possible, and in about a minute and a half I was outside. Going to where you lay, I grabbed hold of you, found that father had been correct in his guess, and my first impression was that you were some dead sailor thus consigned to a watery grave from some vessel."

"But I soon had reason to change my mind. No sooner had I laid hand upon you, scarcely, than I felt you move, and knew that you were alive and beyond doubt the victim of foul play."

"You may believe that I lost no time in getting into the boat with you. You were dragged roughly up to the water-lock, into it, the top was secured with all the haste I could command, and then you and I, together with the flood of water that the lock contained, tumbled down into the inside air-lock."

"To get you from there into the boat proper was the work of another minute, and by the time that we got you out of the sack and unbound, some six, seven, or perhaps eight, minutes had elapsed, and you were about as near drowned as you well could be and have a spark of life left in you. Almost any one would have pronounced you dead, and in a short time you would have been; but father has studied medi-

cine and all that pertains to it, and he declared that there was hopes for you even then."

"I'm much obliged ter him, I am sure," observed Billy, feelingly, "an' likewise ter you, too; also yer brother. If it hadn't been fer you an' yer Porgy, I would about now be lendin' my carcass ter fatten th' crabs o' th' bay, I s'pose. That would be pleasant fer th' crabs, I have no doubt, but rather rough on me."

Captain Dauntton had to laugh.

"I believe all that has been written about you is true," he declared. "If you are so full of life in your present half-dead condition, I cannot imagine what you must be when you are well and able to get around."

"Who is half dead?" Billy demanded.

"You are. You are bruised and sore from head to feet almost, and it is a wonder to me that you are not dead quite."

Billy realized that this was true, and that he could not move without an effort and the penalty of considerable pain. Nor would he be likely to do otherwise for days to come.

"I do feel pooty sore, an' that is a fact," he admitted.

"Let me go on with my story," said the captain of the craft. "Father set to work at you, and we all had our hands full for about two hours. Father was determined to bring you back to life, but I must confess that Charles and I would have given up in despair, had it not been for him."

"We must keep at him, boys," he kept saying. And he went on and told us of cases where drowned persons had been revived even after they had been supposedly dead for an hour or more. Our first work was to roll the water out of you, and then while my brother and I took turns at holding your tongue out and working your arms up and down, father worked to restore your circulation and inspiration. The way he pressed you this way and that was enough to have dislocated every rib in your body. But, it did the business for you, and here you are. What are you laughing at?"

Billy was laughing heartily.

"I was only smilin' ter think that you done somethin' fer me that I was never able ter do fer myself; namely, ter hold my tongue."

Just then a bell sounded somewhere aboard the Pirogue, and the captain arose to go, saying that it was the signal from his father that they must rise for a supply of air, and he hastened out, leaving Billy alone.

CHAPTER IX.

BILLY'S RESURRECTION.

HALF a dozen stories the length of this would hardly serve to tell all of Broadway Billy's experience on board the Pirogue during his nearly three weeks' stay.

It must be crowded into this one chapter.

Other matter demands that we push on, so it must be briefly summed up and disposed of.

What his reflections were when he was left alone, as the narration closed at the end of the preceding chapter, may be imagined; they certainly cannot be fittingly told.

Perhaps his own exposition of them will serve as our best guide.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed, "but I am floored this time fer sure. This beats all th' s'prise parties that ever happened ter me. I do wonder what th' next will be. It is purty sartin that I have been jest a leetle closter ter death this time than I ever was before or sence. This jest melts th' honey right out o' th' comb, an' no mistake about that. It takes th' beans right out o' th' pods. Ter think that I am on board of a craft that goes under water—words fail me ter express my motions. Why, I would give th' best an' brightest two-dollar silver certificate that ever kem out o' th' press if I could have Skinny here. Wouldn't his eyes flip open some, though! He would open his mouth so wide with wonder that I could count th' jints in th' back o' his neck, an' numerate his ribs from th' inside. An' as fer Inspector Br— Hello! I ruther reckon we are on th' move."

The clicking of machinery was heard, and the boat was felt to tremble and quiver like a thing of life.

Billy could not tell whether it was moving forward, backward, or upward; but from what had been said he guessed that it was moving toward the surface.

This surmise was correct, and in a few moments the motion of the waves was felt, and soon after there came a rush of air into the apartment where the boy lay.

The air was cool and refreshing, and Billy drew it into his lungs in eager haste, as though it were to be the last chance that he would ever have.

The Pirogue remained at the surface for some time, but presently its air-ports were closed and it sunk once more out of sight.

But it did not go to the bottom. Instead, it sunk only to a certain depth, its propeller was put in motion, and, headed toward the Narrows, it moved rapidly away from the city.

Some time later, Mr. Dauntton, the elder, came into the apartment where Billy lay.

"Well, my lad, how do you feel?" he inquired.

"I think I improve as I grow better, sir," answered Billy, his face perfectly straight and sober.

The man smiled at the quaint expression.

"That is good," he returned, "and if you only grow better as you improve you will soon be well."

"I hope so, sir; and I want to thank you for saving my life, and for your care of me."

"That is all right, lad; don't mention it. What do you think of the Pirogue? But it is hardly fair to put that question to you until you have seen more of the boat, and what she can do."

"I think she is a great craft, sir," was Billy's response. "Only fer her I would be furnishin' food fer fishes about now."

"You certainly would. My invention has proved the means of saving your life. By the way, has either of my sons told you where we are going?"

"No, sir; they haven't been in."

"We are going to Philadelphia."

"Sweet pertaters! I won't git home in a week!"

"We shall be back here in about two weeks."

"Why, my mom will think fer sure that I am dead," said Billy, anxiously. "I wish I could git word to her that I ain't. I am willin' enough ter take th' trip, but I hate ter have 'em think that I have gone under."

"If it had not been for the Pirogue you would be dead indeed, my lad, but as it is you will turn up all in good time, like a bad penny. It is very thoughtful of you to have your mother first in consideration. Her joy at your return, however, will amply offset any anxiety she will have had about you."

"Well, if it can't be helped, of course it can't," reasoned Billy, "so I'll make th' best of it."

"That is the right view to take of it, my boy; and now I would like to hear your story, and know who it was that tried to put you out of the way."

Billy went ahead and told him all he could about it, and the man listened with much interest.

"You are a remarkable boy," he observed, when Billy ended his narration, "and it is no wonder that your enemies have tried to dispose of you. My son Charles has told me of some of your adventures. It seems that you are something of a police detective."

"I might be, if I had any brain," Billy modestly returned, "but that is a serious impediment that stands in my way. If I have helped th' perlice any, it has been more through dumb luck than anything else."

"Charles has another opinion on that point," Mr. Dauntton observed.

"Then I'll have ter set him right, th' first time I see him, that is all," the boy stoutly declared.

"As for the rascals who tried to murder you," the man further observed, "it will do them no harm to think that they made a success of their undertaking, and their surprise will be all the greater when you turn up to confront them."

"That is jest what I am countin' on," averred Billy. "It is th' delight o' my life ter bring sich fellers up with a round turn when they think they have got everything their own way."

"Perhaps, though, your friends will have found them out and arrested them."

"I don't think so," replied Billy. "I don't see how they could git a clew ter th' case. Nobody knows where I started fer when I left th' stand, an' I didn't even tell, Skinny, my partner. Ye see I had no idea that I was runnin' inter danger. I tell ye they got th' bulge on me in good style, an' that is further proof ter th' fact that I ain't got no brain in my head in th' place where brain orter be."

They talked for some time, but why record all that was said? It would be of interest enough in its way, but there are interests of greater moment that demand our attention.

In two or three days Broadway Billy was able to go about the boat, and he was greatly liked by his three friends, especially Charles, the younger son, who had read everything that had been published about him.

It was an experience that was worth a lifetime, almost, to the boy.

The Pirogue was most certainly a wondrous craft.

It was about sixty feet in length, and was evidently modeled after a fish of some kind. It was larger at the head than at the stern end. Its engines were placed in the center, and it was propelled with two screws. What its motive power was we do not know. It was so arranged that it could be made to ascend or descend at will, and its speed was not by any means slow.

Billy never tired of sitting and looking out as the mysterious, alive-seeming boat forged ahead through the water, its powerful lights illuminating the depths for many yards ahead and around.

The elder son was the captain, as he had studied and understood navigation, and the younger was the engineer. The father held the post of commander.

One supply of air lasted several hours, as Billy soon came to know. Some kind of chemicals were used that kept it charged with its necessary elements for a long time.

Their food consisted of such things as required little cooking. They had a plentiful and varied stock, however, so they did not mind that.

The diving-suit of Charles, the younger son, could be made to fit Billy, and on one or two occasions he went out of the boat and had the novel experience of walking at the bottom of the sea.

To describe the whole voyage is next to impossible, and it would require, in detail, half a dozen stories the length of the present one, as we have already said.

Arriving at Philadelphia, Mr. Dauntton was the only one who went ashore. It was his request that Billy remain aboard, and the sons had no desire to land.

In two or three days they started upon their return trip to New York, and all went well until they reached the ocean and started up the coast.

There they were overtaken by a heavy storm.

If they could have remained at the bottom or near it, all the time, they would not have minded it in the least; but they had to have air, and when they rose to the surface they were in danger. The wild waves tossed their boat this way and that, and there was danger that some vital part of the machinery would be broken.

But they got through without serious accident, and in two weeks from the time of their departure they found themselves once more in New York Bay.

Billy was now eager to get ashore.

He had fully recovered from his shock, soreness and weakness, and was, like the much-quoted Richard, himself again.

There was no excuse for detaining him longer, so it was agreed that he should be allowed to go on shore immediately.

It was about ten o'clock at night when the Pirogue was finally anchored at one of the piers on the East River, and Billy was then at liberty to go where he would.

From their manner, his new-found friends parted with him with regret. They gave him a pressing invitation to join them again whenever he pleased, so long as they remained at New York.

"You will probably find us anchored right here for two days," explained Mr. Dauntton, "and after that we shall take a trip to Boston. From there we shall return here, and will let you know when we are in the harbor. After that we shall start on our intended trip across the ocean."

"I'll try ter see ye afore ye start on that trip," promised Billy, "if I don't see ye afore ye set out for Bosting. Mebbey I'll see ye two or three times, if ye don't git tired o' seein' me."

"No fear of that," they all assured him.

"One thing is sartin," assured Billy, "an' that is that I shall never ferget you an' what you have done fer me."

At length, after many assurances of friendship and remembrance on both sides, they parted, and Billy started immediately for the corner where his place of business was situated.

"Well, here I be, home again," Billy meditated, as he walked along the familiar streets, "an' I reckon I weigh jest as much as I did afore I started. Oh! but won't I make it warm fer them fellers, though, jest as I promised 'em I would if I escaped. An' won't I s'prise mom an' Skinny! I wonder if they have give me up fer dead this time. It is about th' longest stay that I have ever made away from home without lettin' 'em hear from me. But, they will find that I am th' same old Willyum, an' I'll soon be open an' ready fer business at th' old stand."

CHAPTER X.

THE PARTNERS MEET.

In this manner the daring young ex-bootblack bravo entertained himself as he walked hastily along, and in a little while he was at his place of business.

There a great surprise awaited him.

"Sweet pertaters, lamp-black, s'teen-penny nails an' tooth-picks!"

That was the exclamation that escaped him when he beheld the manner in which the corner stand was draped with mourning.

And then he placed his hands on his hips and stood and surveyed it for some time in silence.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he at length ejaculated.

He was on a corner opposite to the stand, and had not yet crossed over to it. By the neighboring electric lights he could see it well enough from where he was.

His next performance was to laugh long and heartily.

He could not help it.

"Well, Skinny, my finespun partner, you have done it this time, an' no mistake about it. Accordin' ter th' 'pearance o' things somebody is dead, an' I reckon that somebody must be me. Anybody would think it was th' President o' th' United States, by th' amount o' drapin' you display. You have got it loaded clear up to th' muzzle, as sure as anything. Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy was much amused, and in truth the stand was greatly overloaded with the emblems of mourning.

"What I would like ter know, though," Billy went on to mutter to himself, "is what proof they have got that I am defunct. If they are merely guessin' at it they will hear from me, an' they kin depend on that. I shouldn't think mom would allow any such a display as this, until she was dead sure that I had gone under."

It was, taken all in all, a serious moment in Billy's life. Here he was, looking upon things as they would be if he were dead indeed.

"They must have some way of inferrin' that I am gone hence," he reflected, "an' I would like ter know what it is; fer I don't see what it kin be. It ain't likely that th' fellers that put me out o' th' way has brought 'em proof o' my death. They might 'a' cut off my head an' sent it home, I s'pose; but as I happen ter have my head along with me, that idee is knocked inter a cocked hat. An' as I am not in th' habit o' wearin' a great signet ring, they couldn't very well send that; an' as fer my body bein' found, that is out o' th' question, as I happen ter be at home in it at present. Well I won't worry about it, fer I reckon I'll find out all about it purty soon now."

His next reflection was as to whether he should go over and rip the mourning stuff down from the stand, or leave it there and let Skinny take it down next day.

"I reckon I'll leave it there," he concluded. "It will be a good joke on my thin partner ter make him take it all down again; an' besides that, it may be well ter let folks think that I am dead, till I can see Skinny an' see how th' land lays. Yes, I will leave it there jest as it is."

Having come to this conclusion, Billy was about to start for home, when whom should he see coming toward the stand from the opposite direction but Skinny.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, "but here will be some fun, sure as I am a livin' sinner. Here comes Skinny hisself, an' if I don't scare th' daylight out o' him, it will be 'cause I can't do it."

Skinny came on at a rapid walk, and as he drew near, Billy stepped out where he would be seen.

It was the sight of Billy that caused Skinny to utter the startled exclamation at the point where we found it necessary to drop him.

And it was quite enough to startle him and cause him to exclaim.

Here was his partner, whom he knew to be dead, standing before him. It was his ghost!

"Billy!" the frightened thin partner ejaculated.

Billy advanced upon him with theatrical strides, raising his right hand as he came near, and when he was near enough, said in hollow tones:

"Skinny, behold yer pardner's oneasy sperret!"

Skinny was as pale as death, and was trembling as though he had a bad case of chills on hand.

"W-w-w-what d-d-do you want, Billy?" he chatteringly inquired.

"Skinny," Billy answered, in the same sepulchral tones, "I have come back ter ha'n't you

because my sperret can't rest easy. I thought you loved me, Skinny, I did, but I see it was all put on."

Poor Skinny was badly scared.

"No it wasn't put on, nuther, Billy," he earnestly averred; "see what I have put up here on th' stand in memory of ye. See this band on my hat. See this other one on my arm."

"Yes, I see; an' you are in a pooty-lookin' state fer a mourner to be in, ain't ye? Ye look as if ye had been sleepin' in a pig-pen."

"I have been in a place almost as bad, Billy, an' all on account o' you," the trembling Skinny managed to say.

"Been off 'on a scream, mebba, now that I ain't here no more ter watch ye an' keep ye in th' straight an' narrer path o' virtue. But, what did you mean, Skinny, by disgracin' my memory as you have done with all this mournin'? Any one would think that th' chief cook o' Tammany was dead."

"Ain't you pleased with it, Billy? If you ain't, I will take it down th' very first thing ter-morrow."

"Be I pleased with it? No, I ain't. Too much of a good thing is no good at all. You have cast sich a gloom over my memory with all this black-stuff, Skinny, that th' shadder of it hides th' way an' I can't tell where I want ter go to. That is why I am back here. If you want me ter rest in peace, my thin partner, th' drapin's will have ter come down."

Billy was as sober as a judge, his right hand was held steadily up, and he continued to speak in the same hollow tones.

It was a trying thing for Skinny's nerves. In his mind there was no doubt but that he was talking to a veritable ghost.

"It shall all come down ter-morrow, Billy," he promised faithfully. "Only give me till then, an' I won't leave a thread of it hangin'."

"It is well. But, remember this: If you do not do as you agree, I will come to your chamber at twelve o'clock every night, an' will ha'n't ye th' remainder o' yer days. This I swear by th' moons o' Mars."

"Gh, I'll do it, Billy; I'll do it sure."

"See that you do. An' now, watch an' see me disappear in a cloud o' red fire an' blue smoke, an' see if you don't smell brimstone after I'm gone."

Skinny drew back with such an expression of horror upon his face that Billy could play the part no longer, but burst into a merry peal of laughter.

The attenuated partner looked more surprised than ever.

"Sweet pertaters! Skinny, don't ye know that it is me, me yer pardner, me th' uncrushed Willyum o' Broadway, in all his native beauty an' elegance, an' alive an' in th' best o' health? Say, don't ye know me? Do you really believe in spooks? Jest come an' grip onder me, an' see that I am real flesh an' blood."

The face of the thin partner was a study. He was halting between two opinions. Was this Billy, or was it his ghost?

"Ain't you a ghost, Billy?" he innocently asked.

Billy went off into a fit of laughing again.

"Not half so much of a ghost as you are, Skinny," he answered.

"But we found yer body," Skinny went on to explain, "an' you have been buried."

This made Billy instantly sober.

"You found my body!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," Skinny affirmed.

"Where?"

"It was found floatin' in th' river."

"When?"

"Only a few days ago."

"An' ye thought it was mine?"

"Sure. So did yer mom, an' so did everybody else."

"Then you an' mom an' everybody else is muchly mistaken, that is all," cried Billy, stoutly. "This here body o' mine ain't been found in th' river, as you go on ter tell it, fer it has been with me all th' time."

"Well, th' other feller looked mighty like you."

"I should say so, if it fooled my mom."

"She was sure it was you," Skinny averred, now growing bolder, since he saw that this was indeed Billy, and that there was a mistake out somewhere; "an' so th' body was buried as yours, an' a stone has been put up ter your memory."

"Sweet pertaters!"

"And, oh! but you did have just the gallus send-off, Billy," Skinny went on, enthusiastically. "It would 'a' done yer heart good ter been there. I tell ye I was proud of th' way it was done. Most all of yer rich friends was out in

their carriages, an' it was about as tony a plant as I ever seen."

"Skinny, it is too bad, ain't it," observed Billy, soberly.

"What is too bad?" Skinny asked.

"Why, ter think that I should come back an' sp'ile th' effect of sich a good send-off as you describe."

"Well, I should say not!" cried Skinny, now himself again; "th' folks will all be mighty glad ter see ye, I kin 'sure ye o' that."

"How did mom take it?" Billy inquired.

"Awful bad."

"So I s'pose, an' I reckon I had better go home ter once an' see her—"

"No you hadn't," opposed Skinny.

"Why?"

"'Cause, she is abed by this time, an' you would scare her inter fits, th' same as ye kem almost servin' me. You will come right along home with me an' stay till mornin', an' then my mom kin go over an' see her an' prepare her fer th' sight of ye."

"Wise head!" Billy complimented, patting his thin partner on the back. "It shall be as you say. Lead on, me noble juke, an' I will foller thee."

Together they started off, talking as fast as they could make their jaws wag, each eager to learn all that the other knew.

Skinny was anxious to know where Billy had been, and perhaps would have found out sooner than he did had he not let out the fact that he had been playing at detective work.

"What!" cried Billy, as soon as it was let out, "you been playin' detective! What have you been tryin' ter detect? You couldn't detect a house afire."

"I couldn't, eh?" retorted Skinny; "that shows what you know about it. I have detected th' men that put you out o' th' way, an' I kin tell ye how they done it, too."

"Oh! get out, what are you tryin' ter give me! Come, now, how did they try ter dispose o' me? Answer that, an' I'll listen ter th' rest o' yer tale."

Skinny answered correctly enough, and Broadway Billy was amazed.

CHAPTER XI.

BILLY'S PROPOSED PLAN.

"SWEET pertaters!" Billy cried, "you have hit it right, Skinny, but how you got onder it is more than I kin guess."

"It was by the mereskin o' my teeth," Skinny assured.

"It must 'a' been."

"Ye see, I was at th' stand, an' mom had jest brought my supper. I was eatin' with one hand an' tryin' ter 'tend ter biz with th' other. A feller kem along, looked at the drapin's in a rather funny way—"

"I don't wonder at that," Billy had to chip in.

"Hold yer head shut, will ye!" Skinny admonished.

"Sartainly; go on."

"Well, th' feller stopped, looked around, an' asked who was dead. I told him. Then I noticed that he had a sort o' sneakin' smile on his ugly mug, an' I didn't like his looks at all."

"What did he die of? sez he."

"Not o' softenin' o' the brain, anyhow," sez I.

"Mebby it was of too much smartness," sez he, an' then, with another of his hateful grins, off he went.

"I done some lightnin' quick thinkin'. It popped inter my head that that feller knowed somethin' about th' manner o' your takin' off, an' I knowed that I mustn't let him git out o' my sight if I wanted ter know more about him."

"Bully fer you!" cried Billy, who was eagerly taking it in.

"I told mom that I was goin' after him, an' I dropped everything an' was off afore she could say snuff. Haven't seen her sence. Jest got back here ter see that she had locked everything up safe, an' then was goin' home."

"Skinny, you are a brick!" Billy complimented. "I didn't think it was in ye, an' that is a fact. When did th' fever strike ye?"

"Neither did I," Skinny answered, "an' as fer th' fever, that hit me jest as I have told ye."

"But, go on an' finish yer tale."

"Yes, ter be sure. Well, I follered that feller to his hole, got inter a hole under th' house myself, an' heard all they had ter say; an' among other things they had a chin about th' neat way they had disposed o' you."

"You done well, my lanky pardner, you done tremenjous well; I couldn't 'a' done any better myself."

"Humph! you couldn't done it at all."
 "What's that?"
 "I say you couldn't 'a' done it at all."
 "Oh, come now, Skinny, that is too good; I'd like ter know th' reason that I couldn't 'a' done it."
 "'Cause ye couldn't 'a' got inter th' hole that I got inter."
 "Might cute, ain't ye; but, is that all ye heard?"
 "Not by a big heap it ain't, Billy; I have got th' business end o' one o' th' meanest rascally plots that ye ever dreamed about."
 "What is it?"
 "I was only wishin' that I had you ter onwind it to, when I was walkin' along up here, out of course I knowed that was useless, as you was dead an' buried; so I had ter do th' next best thing. I was goin' home, let mom know that I was alive, an' then I was goin' ter find Detective Speare."
 "You couldn't done better. By th' way, has he been lookin' fer me?"
 "You bet he has! Why, I reckon th' hull force is on th' scent; but there ain't any clew fer 'em ter work on."
 "That's so. But go on with yer yarn."
 "Well, it seems that this League o' Seven—"
 "Sweet pertaters! thicker an' more of it."
 "That's ther gang. It seems that they have been hired ter do a dirty piece o' work in which there is ter be a little murder ter make it interestin'. When the steamship Ocean Queen comes in ter-morrer, a private yacht is ter meet her down in the bay an' take on board two passengers—a young lady an' her lover. When they are comin' up th' bay, a tug is ter run inter 'em, cut th' yacht in two, an' th' lover o' the lady is ter be drowned sure pop an' no fail. That means that he is ter be made ter drown, anyhow. But th' young lady is ter be saved. If any one else drowns, that will be accident, I s'pose."
 "Sweet pertaters an' ginger-snaps!" Broadway Billy exclaimed, as Skinny concluded his story, "that beats th' merry Dutch. Skinny, you are a he-hoss, you are, an' there ain't no flies on you, nuther. Hereafter you are my pardner in th' hull business, detective-agency an' all."
 "That is all right, Billy; but how about this case? What are we goin' ter do ter block it? I am all in a fever over it."
 "That won't do, Skinny; you want ter keep cool. Now you jest trust this thing ter me, an' I will nip it in th' bud or my name is mud."
 "It is nothin' ter fool about."
 "An' who is foolin' about it?"
 "You are."
 "Git out; I was never more in earnest in my life. How do you make out that I am foolin' about it?"
 "'Cause, you're tryin' ter make poltry out of it, with yer nip in th' bud or yer name is mud." Billy laughed.
 "I didn't mean ter do it, Skinny, an' that is a fack," he declared. "I hope you will forgive me, an' not take no offense. With all my other faults, I don't want ter have it said o' me that I was a poic."
 "Billy, I don't think this is no time ter be foolin'." Skinny protested. "A big deal o' rascally work is on hand, an' we are th' only ones that knows anything about it. If we don't do our duty we will be almost as guilty as th' real rascals."
 "Golly, but th' fever has got holt o' you bad, Skinny, an' no mistake. You have all th' simptoms of a serious attack. Th' last thing in th' world that I would 'a' thought would happen ter you. What you say, though, is sound as a dollar, an' if you ketch me a-foolin' about it, let me know."
 "What are ye doin' now but foolin'? You ain't layin' no plans ter stop 'em from doin' th' deed."
 "Ain't I? That proves that you don't know what is goin' on in my thinker. I have th' plan all laid out."
 "You have!"
 "You bet I have. It don't take me forever ter make a deal o' this kind. I have resources that ye wot not of, me skeleton friend."
 "I am disgusted with ye," Skinny fired out hotly. "Ter think that you will take a serious thing like this in such a cool manner. Don't you see it is life or death? I will go ter-morrer mornin', th' fu'st thing, an' put it inter th' hands o' th' perlice, that is what I will do, an' be hanged ter you."
 "There, there, fatty, don't git so r'iled up about it. You are hanged ter me already, an' you won't do no sich thing. Say, did ye ever know yer pardner ter lie to ye, when th' truth

would answer jest as well? I reckon not. Haven't I told ye that I would take holt o' th' case an' see to it that th' fellers was fetched up with a round turn an' a short jerk? What more d'ye want?"

"But are ye sure ye kin do it?"
 "Skinny, I kin do anything. You an' me will be on hand at that perposed collision ter-morrer, an' if that tug don't go ter th' bottom o' th' bay you kin take me over ter Jersey an' set me up fer 'skeeter-bait, that is all."

"But how will ye do it?"
 "Pardner, listen ter me: How d'ye suppose I got saved when they took me an' dumped me inter th' bay at midnight, all done up in a bag an' a stone tied ter my feet? Kin ye see any way out o' sich a diffikilty?"

"No, Billy, I can't."
 "Neither could I. I thought my name was Dennis, with a big D. But you see I did git out of it all the same, though it wasn't none o' my own doin's; an' here I be, all ready an' ripe fer another state o' tribulation."

"But how was ye saved?"
 "There, now you are gettin' rational ag'in. I'll tell ye all about it, if you will lend me yer ears. I want both o' 'em, fer one won't do. It wouldn't begin ter hold all o' th' strange tale that I have ter onwind ter you."

"Well, go ahead."
 "Prezactly. Well, I went down ter th' bottom—kerchunk! an' that was th' last that I knowed till I made my dayboo ag'in. When I kem to I was in th' queerest little cubby-hole that you ever see'd. I didn't know where I was. By an' by a feller comes in where I was, an' he told me all about it. I was aboard the Pirogue, that boat that goes under water. You have heard about her."

"Oh! come, now, Billy, that won't go down," Skinny protested.
 "It won't eh? Kin ye suggest any other way that I could be saved from a watery grave?"

"No; but ter think—"
 "Don't you do no thinkin' about it, but jest pin yer faith onter what I tell ye. I wouldn't lie ter ye fer a dollar, Skinny, an' you orter know me by this time."

"I know that you are a humbug."
 "Thank ye, fatty; but you are interruptin' me. I was about to tell ye all about it. It seems that when I went down I fell right on th' top o' that under-water craft, an' startled th' inmates 'most ter death. They hurried out ter see what had hit 'em, an' there they found me. They took me in, pumped th' water out o' me, set machinery ter goin' ag'in, an' I was soon all right."

"Then why didn't ye let us hear from ye?"
 "'Cause I was carried off ter Philadelphia. Oh, I tell ye, Skinny, I have had jest a boss excursion, an' no mistake. You wouldn't hardly believe it if I told you all about it."

"I guess you're right. You are rubbin' it on purty strong, an' that is a fack."
 "Neverth'less, my gay an' festive rooster, it is th' truth, th' whole truth, an' nothin' but th' truth."

"Well, I'll have ter take yer word fer it, an' I am glad ter have ye back anyhow. But all this don't solve th' riddle of how ter save that smash ter-morrer."

"Sweet pertaters! Skinny, yer head is thick-er'n mud. Don't you see inter th' trick? We will go an' git th' captain o' the Porgy—hold on, I mean the Pirogue—ter take a hand in th' game; an' if that tug don't git knocked clean out o' th' water, you kin sell my head fer cabbage."

"Great ginger!"
 "What do you think o' that?"
 "Billy, are you in earnest, or be ye foolin'?" Skinny seriously asked.

"Skinny, I was never more in earnest in my life," Billy promptly answered. "What I have told ye is jest th' solid truth, an' th' captain of th' Pirogue is jest th' feller ter take a hand in th' game. As fer Charles, he will go wild over it, an' th' old gentleman will chip right in with 'em. There will be fun ter-morrer, Skinny, an' you kin jest bet yer boots on it!"

CHAPTER XII. THE COUNTERPLOT.

BROADWAY BILLY went home with Skinny, as had been agreed upon, and Skinny's mother was almost frightened out of her senses at sight of him.

It took some time to convince her that he was not a ghost.

Next morning she went over to Billy's home to carry the good news to his sorrowing mother. Mrs. Weston would not believe it at all.

It had been agreed that Billy and Skinny should come on half an hour after Skinny's mother, and when the time was up they started.

Billy entered the room with a cheery "Hello! mom, how's things?" and that of course convinced the woman that she had been mistaken in her identity of the dead boy.

However her eyes had deceived her then, they could not fool her now, and with a scream of joy she sprung forward and clasped Billy to her breast.

It was an affecting meeting.
 Mrs. Weston did not want Billy to go out of the house all day; she wanted him right by her side.

But Billy could not agree to that.
 "Sweet pertaters! mom, it can't be did!" he exclaimed. "It can't be did nobow. Why, a human life, an' mebbey more'n one, depends on my bein' in th' harness ter-day. I'd like ter be with ye, but there's no use thinkin' about it. Afterward, though, I'll give ye one whole day all ter yerself."

The objections of the two women were serious and strong, but the boys were determined, and nothing could turn them.

When they set out from the house it was to go to the pier where the Pirogue was anchored.

It had been arranged that the two mothers should take charge of the business of the corner-stand for the day.

When the boys arrived at the pier, they found a great crowd there, all looking at the strange boat, or the little that could be seen of her.

Captain Dauntton happened to be standing on the end of the pier, and they were about to move the boat out to the middle of the river.

"Hello! my young friend!" he exclaimed, at sight of Billy, "you are just in time, for we are about to go out into the river. We find that we are drawing too much of a crowd here. Will you go aboard?"

"Yes," answered Billy, "for we have come to see you on important business. This is my partner. Mebbe you kin see him without th' aid o' glasses, as th' light is good this mornin'."

The crowd laughed, and the captain of the Pirogue had to smile.

"Oh! he is plainly visible to the naked eye," he returned.

"Shall we go right aboard?" Billy asked.
 "Yes; go right down inside," was the answer, "and I will be with you in a few moments, just as soon as I cast off these ropes."

Skinny hung back a little, as though he did not care to trust himself into the mysterious-looking thing.

"Come right on, pardner," Billy called out, as he descended the rope-ladder that hung from the end of the pier, "there is nothin' ter harm ye, an' it is as safe as a house. In case we should git stuck in th' mud, we kin pull out one of th' bolts, and you kin evaporate through th' hole. Come right on."

Willing to escape from the laughter of the crowd in any direction, Skinny bolstered up his courage and followed his partner down the ladder, and on down into the body of the boat.

But he was trembling in his shoes as he did so.

Mr. Dauntton and his younger son met them at the bottom of the few steps, and Billy was greeted warmly and heartily.

"Allow me ter interdoose my thin partner," Billy said. "He was visible out there in th' sunlight, an' if you look purty sharp mebbey you might see him now. His name is Skinny. Skinny this is Mr. Dauntton, and this is his son Charles. Make your bow."

Skinny could have choked Billy with a good will, but he took it all in as good grace as possible.

Mr. Dauntton and Charles laughed, of course, but they gave the thin boy such a hearty reception that he felt at home at once.

In a few moments Captain Dauntton came down, the opening in the top of the boat was closed, and the machinery was set in motion.

Skinny fairly held his breath.

This was something so entirely new to him that he hardly knew whether he was asleep or awake. He was inclined to think that he was dreaming.

"Hold yer breath, now, partner," Billy cautioned, "fer we are goin' right down among th' little fishes. D'ye hear th' machinery in motion? An' do ye feel th' sensation o' sinkin'? We are on our way ter see Davy Jones."

"Hadn't we better head for the bay?" Mr. Dauntton asked of the captain.

"Just as you say," was the agreement.

"I think we had."

The captain touched a bell, giving a signal to

his brother, and the machinery was immediately put into another motion.

"Away we go," cried Billy; "an' now if you want ter look out, Skinny, jest git up there aside th' captain."

"Yes, go right up, my lad," said Mr. Dauntton, "and see what you can. It will be worth something to you."

Skinny ventured to obey, and as he looked out ahead and around, his eyes opened until they had the appearance of saucers.

"What d'ye think of it?" Billy demanded. "Was I tellin' ye any lie?"

"I guess ye wasn't," the thin partner managed to say. "It is jest ahead o' wonderful."

"Well, I should say so, Billy agreed.

The boat was held on its course until it arrived down in the middle of the bay somewhere, and there it was stopped and allowed to rest upon the bottom.

"Here we are," cried Billy, as he laid hold of Skinny and gave him a shaking, just to amuse himself and show how frisky he felt, "an' this is th' craft that will do th' business fer that tug ter-day, an' don't you forgit it."

"What is that?" inquired Mr. Dauntton.

"I was speakin' ter fatty here about th' business that I said I wanted ter see you on, sir," Billy explained. "As soon as th' others kin give me their attention, too, I will unwind th' story to all of ye."

"All right; but what do you mean by doing the business for a tug?"

"That is part of th' skeem," Billy answered. "There is a tug that has got ter be lifted high an' dry out o' th' bay, ter-day, in order ter save a life. But, here's th' captain an' th' engineer, an' now I'll give 'ye th' whole thing as straight as a string."

They all sat down, and Billy went ahead.

"My pardner here," he commenced, "has been tryin' his hand at detective work in my absence, an' has made a big success of it. He got on ter a clew ter th' fellers that done me up, an' tracked 'em ter their den. Then he got under their crib an' heard all that they had ter say about th' case, an' more besides. It seems that they are up ter a bad game, an' one that has got ter be nipped in th' bud or it will cost one life, an' mebbly a good many more."

"Boy, you astonish me," declared Mr. Dauntton.

"It is enough ter astonish anybody, sir."

"Go on and let us hear the rest of it."

"Well, th' thing in short meter is this: Th' steamship, Ocean Queen, is ter arrive here ter-day. A pleasure yacht is ter meet her an' take off two passengers. One passenger is a young lady, an' th' other is a man, th' intended husband of th' lady. A tug has been hired ter run th' yacht down in th' bay, an' sink her. Th' young lady is ter be saved, but th' plot is that th' man is ter be drowned. That is ter say, he is ter be murdered."

"Horrible!"

"Wal, ruther, I should say."

"A score of lives will be endangered."

"Jest so; an' it will be lucky if they don't drown more than they want ter. I tell ye it is th' dirtiest skeem that I have got on ter in some time."

"Well, what is it you want us to do?" inquired Captain Dauntton.

"True enough," supplemented Mr. Dauntton, "this is a clear case for the police to deal with."

"An' mebbly let 'em make a mess of it," objected Billy. "Th' perlice ain't by no means perfect," he went on, "an' th' surest way that I could think of ter block th' game an' nip it right in th' bud, was ter come ter you an' get you ter be on hand an' run th' tug down. That would save th' disaster, an' then, after that, th' perlice kin take holt o' th' case an' bring th' plotters ter account."

"I agree with the boy entirely," spoke up Charles, the younger brother. "We can take care of that tug, and see that no harm is done to the yacht, and thus do what the police might make a failure of."

"Kerrect," chimed in Billy.

"Why not take steps to warn the captain of the yacht to look out for the danger?" suggested Mr. Dauntton.

"Sweet pertaters!" cried Billy, "you don't git on ter th' case yet, sir. The captain of th' yacht is as deep in th' mud as the other one is in th' mire. Ain't that so, Skinny?"

"Sure thing," Skinny supported.

"Worse and worse," interpolated Captain Dauntton. "They will make a sure thing of it unless some effective step is taken to balk them."

"Of course they will," urged Charles; "and I

think it is our duty to take the matter in hand. Don't you think so, father?"

"Well, I don't know but you are right, boy," the father admitted, "for we can make a sure job of it, where a boat on the surface might make an utter mess of the whole thing."

"An' will ye try it?" asked Billy, eagerly.

"Yes, we will take it in hand."

"Good! Bully fer you!"

"I suppose there is no mistake about this, is there?" Mr. Dauntton inquired.

"Speak up, Skinny," directed Billy, "speak up an' give us th' facts."

"There is no chance for a mistake about it, sir," declared Skinny, "unless they change their minds, an' that ain't very likely, from th' way they was talkin' last night. It is ter be done, an' all th' plans is arranged."

"That is all I want to know. Do you know the name of the tug?"

"No, sir."

"We do not need to know that," put in Captain Dauntton. "We will follow the yacht, and can readily tell if any tug bears down upon her with evil intent."

So it was arranged, and Broadway Billy and his thin partner were happy to think that they had secured such valuable aid.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SCENE OF DANGER.

It was the forenoon of a lovely day, and everything was bright and pleasant.

Just such a day it was as one would choose for a day of pleasure on the water.

At about ten o'clock two carriages drew up in front of the residence of Lady St. Gerome Hamptden.

A man alighted from the first one, ran lightly up the steps to the door, and was promptly admitted.

It was Bertrand Wellingford.

Mrs. Hamptden was ready to receive him.

"Did you think that I was not coming?" he asked.

"Not at all," was the quiet response, "though we have been ready these two hours. I know that you are a man of your word, and one who has never failed me yet."

"Thank you," with a bow, "you pay me an undeserved compliment."

"Not at all. Well, are you ready for us?"

"Yes; the Ocean Queen has been sighted, and will be at Sandy Hook this afternoon."

"That is good. I am glad to know that she will be here before night. Is the yacht ready to receive us?"

"Everything is ready, Lady Hamptden."

"Then we will go down and get aboard at once, if that is your plan."

"It is."

The party, consisting of Lady Hamptden, six other ladies, and two gentlemen, left the house and entered the carriages, and were driven rapidly away.

Bertrand Wellingford was with them.

Now that we can have another good look at him, there need be no further doubt concerning his identity.

He and Captain Iron-grip were one and the same person.

Good-looking, faultlessly dressed, manly in appearance, who would have suspected him of being such a villain at heart?

But a rascal he was, as we need not say.

And a deep, dark scheme he had in mind.

Regina Hamptden, Lady Hamptden's only child, had been abroad to complete her education. Lady Hamptden had been for many years a widow, and being an American by birth, had returned to her native land after the death of her husband. She was very rich, and her daughter, too, was immensely rich in her own right.

While abroad, the daughter had made the acquaintance of one Alfred Hamptden, related to her as second cousin, and the pair had fallen in love with each other. That love had run into an engagement, and he was coming home to make her his wife.

Lady Hamptden was aware of this, of course, and the proposed marriage met with her approval.

Bertrand Wellingford, too, was related to the family in some remote way, but he was not by any means rich, as has been already said of him. But he was on the outlook for wealth, and had his eye upon Regina Hamptden as the shortest road to that desired goal that came under his notice.

He was from England, where he had made the acquaintance of the young lady, and had fallen in love with her, if his greedy desire admitted of love in its make-up. He had been acting in a measure as Mrs. Hamptden's agent,

and had thus come to know much of her business.

He saw Regina in the stepping-stone to the very position in life that he coveted, and immediately began to plan to win her hand in marriage.

But it was a dubious outlook. He was older than she, quite a good deal older, too; and as she had plenty of wealth while he had none, the chances for his winning her were slim indeed.

The next and greatest obstacle that came in the way was a favored lover. This was Alfred Hamptden.

Wellingford tried once to put him out of his path, but made a failure of it, and as the police of London were hot after him, he set out for New York.

In London he had held a position very similar to the one in which we find him in New York, and was, really, a "crook" of the first water. Had it been known, more than one neat bank burglary might have been traced to his door.

And this was the rascal who was plotting to harm the woman who had always been his friend, and who was planning to dispose of the daughter's intended husband, in order once more to clear the field for himself.

After he had come to New York, he had come to know Lady Hamptden personally, and by showing himself at his best before her, and apparently letting her read him like an open book, to see for herself that he was, though poor, a man of honor and gentleman born, had won her regard.

It was this card that he relied on to win finally the consent of the mother to a marriage with the daughter.

A sad accident would occur, the intended husband would be drowned, he—Wellingford—would save the life of Regina, and would forever stand high in the favor of both mother and daughter. From that point it would be but a step to the position of son-in-law, even though he was old enough to be the girl's father.

The reader can now fully understand the villainous rascal's plans, and see that he was desperate enough not to stop at any crime in order to come out successful in the end.

When the party arrived at the pier where the steam yacht was awaiting them, Lady Hamptden was delighted.

"This is charming!" she exclaimed, as she stepped aboard. "Bertrand, you have my entire approval and heartiest thanks."

The villain bowed.

"I could not be more richly rewarded," he said, humbly.

Smart as he thought himself to be, the fellow was blind in one respect. It might not have been an impossibility for him to have won the hand of Lady Hamptden, perhaps. But he may have seen the chance and purposely passed it by, preferring to risk all upon the daughter. This is only a speculation.

The whole party was delighted.

The steam yacht was indeed a beauty, one that Wellingford had secured by the merest chance, and it was handsomely furnished and equipped.

Everything that could be desired was there, and it was with high spirits that the party started out into the river and down toward the bay.

It was in the afternoon, and the majestic steamship, Ocean Queen, came steaming gracefully over the bar at Sandy Hook, and into the lower bay.

Many passengers crowded her deck, and all seemed light-hearted and joyous and full of happy anticipations.

Among them were two in whom we have an especial interest.

These were a young lady and her companion, a gentleman who seemed about five or six years her senior.

They were standing close together, leaning over the rail, and the young lady had a pair of glasses in her hand.

She was a beautiful girl, about twenty years of age, and was richly, though plainly attired. She was talking to her companion in an animated manner, passing the glasses to him frequently and directing his attention to some familiar object, telling him what each was.

He was, perhaps, twenty-six years old, was good-looking, and was blessed with a sound, healthy, and well-proportioned body. He was sun-browned, had a handsome mustache, and looked more like an American than Englishman. He certainly had none of the nonsensical "m'lord" airs about him, but was plain and practical in everything.

Near by was the young lady's maid, and an elderly lady who was evidently her *duenna*.

Boats of various sorts were moving here and

there about the bay, but little attention was paid to any of them until at last one, a pretty pleasure yacht, which looked like a mere toy dancing upon the waves, came nearer than the others, and held on its way directly toward the great leviathan.

The young man was the first of the two to notice it, and he called the attention of his companion to it.

The young lady brought her glass to bear upon the yacht, and in a moment she uttered a joyful exclamation.

"I see my name upon the yacht!" she cried; and instantly she began to wave her handkerchief in a most frantic manner.

There was an instant response from the yacht, where several handkerchiefs were seen fluttering as wildly.

At about the same time the yacht was signaled to the steamship, and then the desires of the persons on the yacht were made known in the true nautical fashion.

The request was granted; the steamer stopped, the yacht drew alongside, and in due time Miss Regina Hamptden and Alfred Hamptden, with their servants, were transferred.

As soon as this was effected the yacht drew away, and the steamer continued on her course, amid the loud cheering of all on board.

The meeting between the mother and daughter can be imagined. It was assuredly a happy one.

There was a great kissing time among the ladies, as is ever the case, and the gentlemen did their part by shaking hands with everybody and with one another.

There were none of Captain Iron-grip's men on board. The arrangement last arrived at was that two of them should be on board the tug, but none on the yacht. It had been found that it could not be well carried out in any other manner. Their presence on board the yacht would have had to be explained to Lady Hamptden, which would have been awkward for Wellingford.

As it was, there was nothing to be questioned, and nothing that could attach suspicion to him, or to the yacht's captain.

A tempting repast was already spread, and in a short time the company were seated around the table, which, by the way, was on the upper deck under the awning.

It was a joyous party, and one that well knew how to make merry the hour. No limit was upon the chattering tongues of the ladies, and the gentlemen had all they could do to hold their own with them, they being in the minority.

Wellingford was at his best, and certainly did credit to the occasion, as he well knew how to do. He was, as he has been described, an easy and fluent talker, and in some manner the whole affair seemed to hinge upon him, though he could not be said to put himself forward.

All was going merrily on, and the yacht was pushing along at good speed, when suddenly her whistle screamed out a signal that caused the ladies to give a start.

They were not far from the eastern shore, and about opposite the northern end of Staten Island.

A whistle was heard in answer, and a tug was seen coming in the opposite direction. Presently the tug sounded another signal, and suddenly changed her course.

There was imminent danger of a collision.

The yacht whistled a sharp signal of warning, and changed her course, and at the same instant the tug swerved back to the old course. Sharp signals were heard on both sides, and in a moment more it was seen that a collision could not be avoided. The scene on the yacht was instantly changed from one of pleasure to one of wild confusion.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PIROGUE ON HAND.

BROADWAY BILLY and Skinny were happy when the Pirogue rose to the surface to remain there and lie in wait for the pleasure yacht.

This began to look like business, and the worry that had been upon Skinny's mind was in a measure removed.

And he had got well over his fears, too.

Now he could enjoy the strange boat as well as Billy, and he did enjoy it to the full extent of his capabilities, too.

"Well, what ye thinkin' about, Skinny?" Billy asked, when Skinny had sat for some time in silence, looking out through the small windows across the surface of the water.

The upper part of the boat was just out of the

water, and no more, and the little windows were on a level with the surface.

"I was wonderin' whether this boat could go across th' ocean," Skinny made known.

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed Billy, "I didn't think you was of big enough caliber ter have a thought as broad as that."

"I am a deep thinker," Skinny retorted, paying back in the same coin.

"So I see, now that I am aware of the fact," Billy still piled on.

"And my ideas is broad, too," Skinny fired again. "But," he added, "that don't give any solution of th' problem that I had in mind."

"Been feedin' on dictionary again, have ye," taunted Billy. "I see I'll have ter study up, or I soon won't be able ter converse with ye at all. What was th' problem that ye was rasslin' with?"

"Whether this thing could cross th' ocean."

"That is ter be tested," Billy explained, having now had his fling. "They are goin' ter set out in a short time an' try ter make th' voyage."

"And if we do," Mr. Dauntton here broke into the conversation, "the manner of ocean travel will be revolutionized, and our names will be immortalized. I am eager for the trial."

"I would like to go with ye," declared Billy. "I bet it will be a glorious trip."

"We could not consent to take you," was the answer. "We will be taking our lives in our own hands, with the chances against us, I am afraid. There are a thousand dangers to be encountered that we know nothing about now, and a very little thing may leave us helpless at the bottom of the sea. No, we will take no one with us."

"It will be risky, and no mistake," Billy owned, "but I believe I would be willin' ter take my chances with th' rest of ye. Morn' all that, I begin ter believe that I was born ter die of old age, an' my presence aboard might bring ye through all right. Jest keep it in mind an'—Hello! there comes a steam yacht, sure as I am here."

"Let me see," said the captain, and Billy quickly got down to give him room in the small pilot-house.

"Yes, so it is," Captain Dauntton agreed, as soon as he got sight of the boat, "and it is heading down the bay."

"We ought to know the name of the one we are to look for," observed Mr. Dauntton.

"That is true," agreed Charles, "but since we do not, we must do the next best thing."

"And that," completed the captain, "is to follow the first yacht that comes along, which is this one."

"You have hit it square," chimed in Billy.

"Well," said Mr. Dauntton, "let us go under and follow her then."

The air-ports were closed, and in a short time the Pirogue was beneath the waves, and bearing away toward the course in which the yacht was approaching.

There were plates of glass in the top of the pilot-house, as well as in the sides, so that objects overhead could be seen as well as those around.

In due time the Pirogue came up with the yacht, and the captain made the announcement.

"That is good," said Mr. Dauntton. "Now keep her in sight, and be on the lookout for the tug."

"The tug will not be seen till on th' return trip," Billy reminded.

"True enough. Well, keep your eyes well about you, James."

That the captain promised to do, and so they pushed on down the bay, the mysterious boat now gliding along right under the bottom of the yacht, regulating its speed so as to keep that position.

Finally the yacht came to a stop, and the Pirogue did the same.

Then there was a wait, during which some of those on the yacht employed the time in fishing. It is perhaps needless to add that they did not catch anything.

When the yacht moved on, the Pirogue was not long in taking her place beneath her, and in this manner continued on in her company.

Finally, not far away, the monster hull of an ocean steamer was seen, and the yacht came to a stop once more, and then the shouting from the latter was heard, though the words could not be distinguished.

When the yacht moved again, it was to draw alongside the steamer, and the Pirogue then knew positively that she was on the right track.

When the monster and tiny boats drew apart,

the sub-marine craft held her place under the latter, and continued with her on her return up the bay.

Now and again the merry laughter aboard the yacht would reach the ears of those on board the Pirogue, but otherwise the silence was unbroken save by the rattle of the machinery and an occasional exchange of words.

Broadway Billy was in the pilot's lookout with Captain Dauntton, and Skinny was with Charles in the apartment where the engines were managed.

As all were eagerly waiting for the crisis now, but little was said among them.

The captain kept his father posted on everything, and now and then passed a word with his brother.

"Charles!" he presently spoke, when they had been gliding along for some time, and the tug, if one was to appear, was to be expected at any moment.

"Ay!" the younger brother responded.

"I think I see another boat approaching now. Be ready to give instant attention to my signals."

"Depend on me for that," was the response.

Charles was eager for the time for action to come, and there was no danger that he would be found wanting when it arrived.

It was now at hand.

Captain Dauntton did not take his eyes off the tug scarcely, except to keep his accustomed lookout for obstacles ahead; for a tug he had soon made it out to be.

Every point was quickly transmitted to the others.

Nearer and nearer the tug and yacht drew to each other, and then were heard their signals.

"That is it!" cried Skinny, unable to contain himself, "that is jest th' way th' rascals plotted it."

"Silence!" Mr. Dauntton ordered sternly; "no talking now."

This was necessary, for some vital word from the captain to the engineer might be misunderstood, and a failure made of the whole thing right at the critical moment.

Captain Dauntton's signals were clear and sharp, and they were obeyed with a quickness that was hardly to be credited.

The crisis was at hand.

The Pirogue made a sudden stop; it backed a little; its prow rose to an angle of almost forty-five degrees; it stood thus for a moment, trembling, it seemed; then it gave a sudden turn to the left and shot upward.

All within the wonderful craft were holding fast to something, and in a second a shock was felt that would otherwise have knocked them to the floor.

It was all over, and the collision had been averted.

Let us return to the yacht.

The scene there has been described as one of wild confusion. Such it assuredly was. It looked as though nothing could avert the calamity that was about to come upon them.

Nor could it have been averted, save the timely interposition of the Pirogue.

Just when the crash was looked for the next moment, there arose out of the water a blue-black, shining object, great in size, interposing its body between the two crafts, and striking the tug a sharp blow on one side near the prow that turned it completely around, and almost caused it to go to the bottom.

What had happened no one could realize.

Those in the plot were both frightened and puzzled, while the others were grateful and mystified.

What could be the thing that had so suddenly put in its appearance and, on the one hand frustrated their scheme; on the other, saved them from so great a disaster?

"A whale!"

"The sea-serpent!"

Such were the cries that were instantly heard. No one guessed the truth.

The tug soon recovered from the shock, righted, and, having no further excuse to come near the yacht, steamed rapidly away, and the yacht resumed her course.

Bertrand Wellingford was white with rage, a rage which he had to choke down and smother, though he did give some vent to it in an attack upon the pilot of the yacht.

"You, sir!" he cried out, "what do you mean by such work as that? Do you not know your business? You came near drowning us all."

"Not my fault, sir," the man answered; "you saw how it was. That fellow must be drunk. He paid no attention to my signals."

"I will talk with you about it later," Wellingford said, and thus he closed the matter for the

time. He did not want to say too much in the presence of the others.

The party sat down at the table again, but their pleasure had been marred, and they did not again enter upon the full enjoyment of the voyage.

When the yacht arrived at the pier, and they landed, they drew a breath of relief, and no doubt each felt thankful that it was over.

When they reached the residence of Lady Hamptdon, however, their spirits rose again, and the evening was pleasantly passed.

Wellington was the best feature of the occasion. He helped everybody and everything over the rough places, and when he took his leave he was missed.

He had certainly made an impression upon both the mother and daughter that they could not soon forget.

What if his plot had been a success? But, then the occasion would have been a far different one.

CHAPTER XV.

SPREADING THE NET.

"SWEET pertaters!"

Broadway Billy's pet exclamation, and it came out with unusual force when the shock of the collision was felt.

"I thought we was goin' ter bu'st right through 'em," he observed.

"No, I did not intend to do that," explained the captain; "I merely wanted to ward them off. I guess I came near swamping the tug, though."

"I should say you did. I guess they thought the lightnin' had struck 'em."

"Or an earthquake had bucked up under them."

It did not take many moments to bring the Pirogue back to her proper position, and then those on board looked around to see the result of their work.

"They saw that they had turned the tug about, and as they looked they saw it steam away. A little later the yacht resumed her course."

"That settles the case for the present," remarked Captain Dauntton, "and I flatter myself that we have done a good stroke of work. We have saved several lives, and have done no damage to anybody or anything."

"It was a mighty good stroke!" exclaimed Billy. "I knowed you could do it, an' I told Skinny you could. Th' perlice couldn't done half as well. I bet my suspenders there was a surprised lot o' folks aboard them two boats."

"Well, rather, I should say."

Their neat stroke of work gave them plenty of material for conversation all the way back to the city, for they returned immediately, as Billy wanted to get ashore as soon as he could.

The Pirogue carried them to New Pier 1, and there they took their leave of their new friends.

Billy and his partner had made a good impression upon Mr. Dauntton and his two sons, and their parting was with as many kindly words as Billy's first parting had brought forth.

Standing on the end of the pier, they watched the Pirogue as it sunk under water, and they have not seen nor heard from it since.

"Well, my gay an' festive shadder," Billy remarked, as the two boys set out for Broadway, "what do you think o' this world, anyhow?"

"I would like ter know fer sure whether I am awake or dreamin'," was the sober response.

"Ye would, eh? Shall I stick a pin in ye an' try ye, like mom tries bread ter see when it's done?"

"No, ye needn't go ter that trouble, Billy; if you say I am awake, why, I'll take yer word fer it."

"Well, I reckon that ye are, Skinny."

"But don't it beat everything!"

"Skinny, it beats patent medicine, an' th' thing that kin beat that is at th' head o' th' class. You kin set that down as a fact. But, pardner, I have been thinkin'."

"That so?"

"Fact."

"Well, what ye been thinkin'?"

"I have been thinkin' that our work ain't half done yet."

"I know that as well as you do. We have got ter have that Sworn Seven scooped in, an' have 'venge on 'em fer what they done to you."

"Yes, you kin bet yer life that we will do that; but there is another p'int that has got ter be looked after."

"What's that?"

"Why, don't ye see that th' captain o' th' Seven will soon try some other way ter put that man out o' th' world? An' here we are without

a single clew as ter who he is. Somethin' has got ter be done."

"We will soon find out who he is."

"How d'ye make that out?"

"Why, th' news o' that kerlission will be in th' papers, an' in course his name will be mentioned."

"That is where ye hang fire, Skinny. Who is goin' ter put it inter th' papers? It sartainly won't be Captain Iron-grip, an' it won't be th' captain of either th' yacht or th' tug. That you kin bet on. An' Iron-grip will do his best ter keep it out anyhow. No, sir, you won't see it in th' papers."

"That's so; I didn't think o' all that."

"Well, what follers?"

"Didn't ye git th' name o' th' yacht?"

"There wasn't a sign o' a name on her."

"That's bad; but it won't take me ferever ter find out what yacht it was, an' then—"

"An' then nothin'. What d'ye think we'd git out o' th' captain o' that box? Why, th' very question would frighten him out o' th' harbor."

"You are right, Billy; we are blocked, an' no mistake."

"But we ain't floored, not by a good deal we ain't," Billy cried. "You know where th' gang hangs out, an' we will git onto their shapes afore they knows it. It is too bad that neither one of us got a sight o' that Captain Iron-grip's face."

"That's so; but I'd know that feller that I follered, if I was ter meet him in Rushy."

"Yes, that's one p'int; an' now I'll tell you what we will do. We will go an' let our moms know that we are kickin', an' then we will go an' hunt up Speare."

"Bully! That will boost us right along."

So they decided, and that they did.

In a little time they had carried out the first-mentioned part of the plan, and found themselves at the detective's office.

They were fortunate enough to find him in.

The surprise of the detective at the sight of Billy can be imagined.

It did not take long for Billy to tell his story, and although the detective could hardly credit so strange a tale, he knew that Billy was in sober earnest, and that what he said was to be relied upon.

"And you say that neither of you has seen the face of that Captain Iron-grip, eh?" he questioned, when the story was ended.

"Nary a sight have we had of it," Billy affirmed.

"That is one bad point; but we might be in a worse fix. Your partner here knows where their place is, and we will have it pulled."

"Yes; an' if we go off too quick at that," Billy put in, "we may miss th' big game after all."

"Right you are, my lad. Well, can you suggest anything?"

"I think I kin."

"Let's hear from you, then."

"What I have got in mind," Billy set forth, "is this: Ter-night Skinny an' me will go down ter their crib and begin a little work. Skinny kin make that hole big enough ter let me in, an' then both of us kin set to work an' make it big enough fer half a dozen perlice ter crawl inter."

"What good will that do? We want to get into the house, not under it."

"That is all right; you ain't heard me out."

"Well, go on."

"When we git th' hole that big, you kin send a man or two down late at night, say one or two o'clock in th' mornin', an' they kin take a jack along an' lift some of th' floor boards an' git inter th' room. See?"

"I begin to get the drift of your meaning, and your idea is a good one. Go on."

"When that is done, then they kin take out th' nails, an' have th' floor all ready ter lift right up at a second's warnin'. You kin have men on th' watch all th' time, an' if we git trapped, then they kin raid the den."

"That is what we will do. And when the work is done, then you and your partner, and a man or two of mine, can take turns in watching under the place, and as soon as you find that the Sworn Seven are in session, then we will come down upon them and gather them in."

"There, now we have got it down fine, an' if there ain't weepin', wallin', an' gnashin' of teeth, you kin kick me inter th' middle o' next week."

It was a plan that promised success, and it was about the only one that they could act upon that promised them the whole seven rascals in a bunch.

The details were all arranged, everything was understood, and the boys took their leave.

It had been fixed that the boys' mothers

should not disturb the mourning on the stand, and now it was agreed that Billy should remain "dead" until after the grand raid.

He adopted a disguise, and was not seen around the stand very often.

That night he and Skinny went down to the miserable den on the miserable street, and, watching their chance, Skinny got into the hole.

In a little time he had dug away enough earth to allow Billy to join him, and soon both were hard at work, as busy as beavers and as silent as mice.

Outside two men were on guard, and signals had been agreed upon.

Voices were heard in the rooms above, as the boys were at work, but it was clear that only a few of the band were present.

Both lads were armed with big, rounded trowels, and the way they went into their work showed that they were by no means lazy.

They dug a trench, about three feet wide and two feet deep, pushing the earth back under the other parts of the floor, and as the ground was soft and free from any very large stones, their work was not really hard.

They stuck at it nobly, until the early hours of the morning, when they crept carefully out and away, and went home and to bed.

Their task was done.

The alley upon which the hole opened was rather dark, so that there was but little likelihood that their work would be discovered; and anyhow there was little trace of it, except in the fact that the hole had been made larger.

On the next night the workers returned, using the greatest care in their approach, and with them came two men who had the appearance of rough-clad mechanics.

Such they were.

When all were under the house, they could do nothing until the inmates had gone away.

It had been discovered that the den was closed and locked most of the time during the day, and that no one remained there all night.

Only a few of the band were there, as on the previous night, and they did not remain very late.

As soon as the coast was found to be clear, then the men set to work. They lifted three of the floor-boards close to one of the walls, and soon all were in the room above, where the hideous chandelier was hanging, and where the seven skeletons were seen upon the floor. It was but a common-looking place, now that the red light was not upon it, and none of the party was greatly alarmed at the sight. They set to work at once to complete the task so well begun.

CHAPTER XVI.

SPRINGING THE TRAP.

THE floor of the room was provided with a carpet, but that carpet did not entirely cover it, there being a border of bare floor about three feet wide on two of the sides.

It so happened that the boards of the floor had been removed at one of these places.

When the entrance had been effected, word was passed out to Detective Speare, who was on hand anxious to learn of the success or failure of the plan, and he came in and took a survey of the place.

"We will have them like 'mice in a jug," he observed.

"You bet we will!" cried Broadway Billy. "We can have men on th' watch on th' outside, so that none of 'em kin git away, an' then at th' right moment we will pop up through th' floor an' scoop 'em all in. Oh! but I am jest in a fever ter see th' trap sprung on 'em; ain't you, Skinny?"

"Great ginger, yes," Skinny owned.

The dirt that had been made by the lifting of the boards, and by the entrance of the boys and men, was cleaned up, and everything was set in order, so that it would not be discovered that the den had been invaded.

When that was done two of the boards were replaced, the party made their retreat, and the other board was pulled into its place.

All the nails had been removed, and no one would know that the floor had been disturbed.

Detective Speare left a man on guard, and the others separated and went their ways.

On the following night, about nine o'clock, as Broadway Billy was on watch under the "crib," he was suddenly gratified to hear the entrance of several men into the place, and to hear the voice of Captain Iron-grip.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed under his breath, "now we are in fer it, an' my first business is ter git word ter Speare."

He lost no time in getting to the entrance,

making the signal, and bringing the outside guardsman to him.

"Th' rats is in th' trap," he hurriedly said; "go fer th' cats."

The man said never a word, but hastened away, and Billy returned to his post to listen.

It soon appeared that the men had a prisoner with them.

"Is it a detective?" Billy was in time to hear one of the men inquire.

"No, it is not a detective," Captain Iron-grip answered, "but it is the man whom we tried to dispose of the other day when the Old Boy interfered with our plans."

Broadway Billy could hardly keep still.

Here he was, just in time to save that man's life again. Now it all depended upon the promptness with which Speare answered his call.

"An' what will ye do with him now?" one of the fellows asked.

"We will send him to keep company with that boy, down in the bottom of the bay," the captain replied.

At this they laughed.

"That is a sure way, an' no discountin' that," one observed.

"Is it?" thought Billy; "you wait an' hear what I will have ter say on that head."

There was considerable of talk, and after a time the men were heard to move into the other room and bolt the doors after them, though Billy had to wonder where the bolts could be. Even Speare had been unable to find the door with any certainty.

The explanation was that the bolts were in the face of the door, or its edge, if you will; and that they were moved by secret springs.

Billy was in a fever lest Speare and his men should arrive too late. Why did they not come? It seemed an age since he had sent for them.

But they were soon at hand, and one by one they crept in under the den and took their places, Skinny coming with them, as he had been faithfully promised that he should not miss the fun.

It was clear from what was heard, that it was their intention to drown the man who was in their power, and that it was to be done in a manner similar to the way in which they had disposed of Billy.

"Why do you desire my death?" the prisoner was heard to ask.

"That is something that you will never know," was the reply of Captain Iron-grip.

"But, who is it that wants me put out of the way?"

"Another question that cannot be answered. Let it be enough for you to know that within a few hours you will be in the other world."

"My life has been attempted before; is it the same person who is seeking it again?" the prisoner further asked.

"I think I can safely answer that it is," Captain Iron-grip replied; "but let us have no more talk about it. Men, see to it that he is securely bound, and we will leave him here till after midnight, when we will take care of him."

The moving of feet was heard, as the men obeyed the order.

"He can't git away," one of them announced.

"It is well," said the captain. "You may employ the time as you will, my man," he added, addressing the prisoner, "until our return. You are in good company, and as shining as these bones are, so yours shall be ere long."

It was evident that they were about to leave the room, and Speare gave the sign for the attack upon them.

With a single movement the boards of the floor were thrown up, and the detective, the policemen, and the boys, all were in the room in a moment of time.

It was a surprise complete, and the officers had the rascals covered with their weapons before they could realize what had happened.

"The one of you that makes a move is a dead man," said Detective Speare, in a stern voice.

Even as he said it, he and one of his men moved forward, and in almost no time at all every one of the fellows was handcuffed.

Their surprise had been too great for them to think of offering resistance until it was too late.

When that was done, the officers snatched the gowns from them, and nearly every one of them was instantly recognized.

"Bertrand Wellingford!" the prisoner cried in blank astonishment, as that villain was unmasked.

Captain Iron-grip had nothing to say. He was looking at one of the attacking party, and his lips were parted and his face was blanched.

The one he had his eyes on was Broadway Billy.

"Oh! it is me," Billy exclaimed, "an' I am as chipper as I ever was in my life. I reckon it is a matter o' s'prise ter you ter see me here, after th' way you disposed of me, but here I am all th' same. There is some things in this world that you don't know yet, captain, an' th' chances is that you won't live long enough ter learn 'em. You are likely ter be hanged, I should say. At any rate, you are booked fer a term up th' river, an' while you are there you kin while away th' weary hours in tryin' ter solve th' problem o' how Willyum o' Broadway kem ter life again."

It was a matter of the greatest surprise to them all, and not one of them could form any idea of how the boy had escaped from what they had looked upon as his certain death. Ay, more; had he not been found and actually buried? They could not comprehend it.

The Sworn Seven were severely dealt with, and not one of them escaped the full penalty of the law.

It was a great surprise to Lady Hamptden, and when the whole case was made known to her she could not realize that it was true. Could Wellingford be such a hardened wretch? she questioned.

The proof against him was the answer.

Alfred Hamptden and Regina were married, and honored guests at the wedding were Broadway Billy and his partner, Skinny.

Skinny never tires of talking about the affair, and declares that it was a good deal greater than anything he ever dreamed about. In comparing it, he insists that it was not far behind Broadway Billy's funeral.

The two boys are still in business at the old stand.

Skinny has now little to say in opposition to Billy's detective work, since he has had a taste of it himself. Billy declares that he is afraid the fever will break out upon his thin partner in a severe form, suddenly, and carry him off.

The Pirogue has not been heard of, since it was last seen by the two boys, and they are afraid that its ocean trip proved disastrous to their three friends.

They are very anxious concerning them, and are living in hopes their worst fears may not be realized, and that the Pirogue may yet come to light all safe and sound.

Our hopes are with them.

The strange tale comes to an end.

Only a few minor points remain to be brought out.

It was never learned who the boy was that was thought to have been Broadway Billy, and who as such was buried.

About one of the first things that Billy attended to, when other matters of greater moment had been disposed of, was to have the headstone taken down, and his name and the accompanying words erased from it.

In place of that he had the one word "UNKNOWN" cut in, and with that inscription the stone still marks the unknown's grave.

"My time hadn't come yet," Billy declared, "an' there is no use tryin' ter get a feller out o' th' world afore his time is ripe. It begins ter dawn upon my darkened intellect that I was born ter die of old age, or some other chronic ailment o' th' mortal body. I wasn't never meant ter be killed. If I had been, my stock o' lives would 'a' been run out long ago, and I would now be in my wooden overcoat. No, sir-ee, Broadway Billy wasn't meant ter be killed, an' ye kin publish it abroad so that he who runs may read. I don't want anybody ter make any mistake on that p'int. An' ye kin add as a postscript ter that, that Willyum o' Broadway is still in th' harness, an' that he adds his weight ter the side o' justice an' right every time."

"Broadway Billy dead? Well, hardly."

THE END.

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